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ADDICTIVE AND WONDERFUL: THE EXPERIENCE OF READING THE *HARRY POTTER* SERIES

Sara Martín Alegre (ed.)



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Preface: An Unforgettable Teaching Experience

Sara Martín Alegre, Sara.Martin@uab.cat

LLEGIR¹

Llegir és un regal
que els llibres ens donen.

Podem llegir
gràcies als contes.

Llegir és una il·lusió
per als sentiments.

Quan llegeixo em diverteixo
i ompló d'emoció
el meu cos, amb il·lusió.

Lola Martín Pons, March 2014

What better way to start a volume on the experience of reading as a young person than the words of a 9-year-old poet? 'Reading' reflects exactly both the overt glee and the deep emotion which colour the 56 essays (or 'testimonials' as I have called them) gathered here –even though the poet herself is not (yet!) a fan of the *Harry Potter* series.

The idea to produce this volume came to me as a logical consequence of my curiosity about the enthusiasm I detected among the first students who learned about my project to teach an elective subject on the *Harry Potter* series. Actually, whenever I have mentioned the subject to other students I have often come across the same enthusiasm –even among some colleagues and, to my surprise, a member of the staff in our library.

My own impression is that I have stumbled into a secret story linking together many, many students in our English Studies classes (and in other classes). It's either 'secret' or the proverbial elephant in the room, I don't know. What I can tell is that even though the students I have been teaching in this elective had mostly known each other for a few years, they had no idea that they shared, as you will see, a very similar experience of the *Harry Potter* series. An experience which is, no doubt, crucial in their lives not only as readers but also as persons. To my surprise and theirs, this experience was also shared (and in practically the same ways) by our visiting students, from places as diverse as Bulgaria, China, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. And with degree backgrounds as different from English as Business, Marketing, Economics, and Media Studies.

¹ READING: Reading is a present/which books make us./ We can read/thanks to tales./Reading is a joy/for our feelings./ When I read I have fun/and fill up with emotion/my body, in joy.

I explain in my own essay the circumstances that led to my programming the elective in the academic year 2013-14 (at the time of writing this, in early May 2014, I'm a month away from the end of classes and from the beginning of the final part of assessment). I planned the subject very carefully, as an introduction to the practice of Cultural Studies, based on a major case study, that of the *Harry Potter* series. You may check the syllabus at <http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/procur/2013-14/p100208a2013-14iCAT.pdf>, though this has varied in practice as I have included more guests. There will have been six in total: a colleague, a doctoral student, two MA students, a BA student from another degree and even an actor –the one who dubbed Harry into Catalan. I have devoted two sessions to fan fiction, for which I asked students volunteers to teach their classmates (and me). Eight wonderful girls took up the challenge, four of them auditors or non-registered students (at one point I had ten in class, apart from my 35 official students). I am pleased to say that not only the class but I myself have learned plenty from *all* these excellent guest teachers.

From the moment I started planning the subject, it was clear to me that this had to be a shared experience. This could not work in the traditional way, with lectures and students making notes –I could not be the *only* teacher. As you can see, I have followed this methodology as consistently as possible, which does not mean that my work as a lecturer has been less intense. Each lecture has involved many hours of preparation, as my mission has always been to teach students to go beyond fandom and into literary and cultural criticism, an aim in which, they tell me, I have succeeded. Not without some problems... although students are managing to keep their passion for *Harry Potter* alive despite my (mostly welcome) criticism of the weaker points in the text.

Emotion has run high in class very often but it's never been corny, trite or trivial. I can only say that we have built a beautiful complicity, which has enabled my students to openly discuss their deep-seated, intense feelings for the series. I myself chose to a great extent to teach this subject because, as you can read in my essay, I could not make sense, despite being a very experienced reader, of the emotional overreaction that reading *Harry Potter* provoked in me –particularly as regards Sirius Black. You can read in my own blog how far this went, in the post about how Black's wand 'chose me' (<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2014/04/01/the-wand-chooses-the-witch-a-story-for-potterheads/>).

At some points I have felt very weird: the first time I mentioned Dobby the house-elf, or when my students wondered how come I didn't know which house I belonged to (I'm Ravenclaw...). At others, I have wondered how far teaching a particular issue would lead me: the information I had to gather about the American one-drop rule and pan-Western eugenics to explain Voldemort's obsession for blood purity was quite distressing. I have often wondered what a complete stranger to the series would think if s/he walked into my classroom and caught us discussing passionately whether Harry should have used the 'Avada kedrava' curse instead of 'Expelliarmus' in his final duel with the villain Voldemort.

My own academic projects derived from the subject were two when I started (two more have materialised since then²). First, I wanted to write my long overdue essay on Sirius Black (currently in progress) and I wanted to write an article about the students' experience of growing up with the series (just started). I asked them to write an essay based on my own testimonial with a view to using the material as a 'field work' resource for my own article. I also reserved three classroom sessions for students to present orally to their classmates that experience. The idea behind this was to see a) whether there was a common pattern, b) what it consisted of, c) how significant the experience of reading *Harry Potter* was in relation to the students' growth as readers, and d) whether this experience was as shallow as its critics argued, or something else. Harold Bloom, after all, had published that famous article in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Can 35 millions readers be wrong?" (7 November 2000)³ in which he claimed that indeed they were wrong. I wanted to dispute this verdict.

I may agree with Bloom's exposure of "the aesthetic weaknesses" of Rowling's work but please consider how insulting his snobbish article is to young readers:

Perhaps Rowling appeals to millions of *reader non-readers* because they sense her wistful sincerity, and want to join her world, imaginary or not. She feeds a vast hunger for unreality; can that be bad? At least her fans are momentarily emancipated from their screens, and so may not forget wholly the sensation of turning the pages of a book, any book (my italics).

I am, by the way, one of the 'cultural critics' who, together with, as Bloom sneers, *The New York Times*, "will go on celebrating another confirmation of the dumbing-down it leads and exemplifies". Dumbing down indeed. Bloom even has the gall to write that he hopes that his "discontent is not merely a highbrow snobbery, or a nostalgia for a more literate fantasy to beguile (shall we say) *intelligent* children of all ages" (my italics). I feel so sorry that such an illustrious critic is missing so much... and so proud to have had the inspiration to bring Harry into my university classroom.

When I first read my students' candid, often very moving, essays it was suddenly clear to me they had to be published.⁴ The title *Addictive and Wonderful* is borrowed from a phrase in Marta Canals's essay –it defines very well the attitude of *Harry Potter* readers towards the process of enjoying the series (books and films). If you agree with Bloom, you'll find nothing to enjoy and learn in the following pages. If you are more open-minded and genuinely interested in learning how the *Harry Potter* phenomenon has blossomed and how it has help young readers onto the path of

² A paper on Voldemort's body for a conference on monstrosity (UAB, December 2014) and a second collective volume containing my students' papers on *Harry Potter*, also available from UAB's repository, DDD.

³ I know this is very poor scholarship but the ProQuest archives for *The Wall Street Journal* do not carry Bloom's article. The text is reproduced instead in many *Harry Potter* fan websites, for instance, <http://1xn.org/softspeakers/PDFs/bloom.pdf>, from which I borrow the passages quoted here.

⁴ My editorial intervention has been limited to correcting obvious grammar, vocabulary and syntax mistakes, also misspellings. I have occasionally replaced some words or straightened out awkward phrasing. I decided not to translate the essays originally in Spanish or Catalan, to make the point that the phenomenon spreads far beyond English.

reading, I'm sure you'll love this volume, as I love it. Bloom says of Rowling's work that it is "at least a millennial index to our popular culture". As you will see, 'at least' is absolutely wrong in this context. As student Kyle Ritchie writes here, "If there were two things that defined our generation, they were 9/11 and *Harry Potter*". If you are not prepared to learn more about this, then stop reading right now.

The experience narrated here is amazingly consistent as regards readers born in the early 1990s, right after the fall of the Berlin Wall. They were between 6 and 11 when they accessed the first volume, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, published in 1997. Parents, other relatives such as aunts and cousins, school friends, primary and secondary school teachers were also closely and even deeply involved in what turned out to be a long-lasting experience. The last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, came out in 2007, the last film in 2011. On average students' experience of reading the series and seeing the movies covers between 8 and 10 years, during which, as many claim, *they grew up with Harry*. In the juicy interview with Oprah Winfrey, Rowling explained that the best compliment she has ever been made came from a young woman who suddenly stopped her in the street to declare 'You are my childhood'. My students absolutely agreed.

Many students, as they tell me, finished reading the series right before entering university. And they have been reading avidly since then... mainly not what we teach them but what they learned to love: fantasy (Tolkien, Martin) and science fiction. As a teacher of English Literature and Cultural Studies, I find this collective generational experience not only fascinating but also absolutely essential to understand who our students are. If you're a teacher, you may still obviously ignore it. What I can tell you is that my greatest pleasure this semester is that a) I don't have to force anyone to read books they are not interested in, b) I can discuss any obscure little corner of the *Harry Potter* series because everyone in class knows the text. They often correct me...

Let me go back to emotion. As I finish the edition of this volume, my students are presenting to their classmates their testimonials (also their critical views, which are quite harsh as you'll see). We are having a wonderful time together as the students are being very generous when it comes to sharing biographical details not that easy to handle, from being abandoned as a child to enduring bullying. There are very funny moments (a girl showed us photos of the graffiti-covered toilet in the café where Rowling started writing her series!), and, something I particularly appreciate as an adult twice their age (though not a parent): students have offered very touching descriptions of how mothers and fathers shared *Harry Potter* with their children, often reading for them or *with* them.

I am not sure whether I'll teach 'English Cultural Studies: The *Harry Potter* Case' again, as I think I have been very fortunate to capture a unique generational moment that will not repeat itself. The original *Harry Potter* readers may be still reaching university and it might well be that I soon get another chance to go through the same unforgettable emotional and professional experience as this year. Yet, my own students tell me that they find it very hard to convince younger siblings or cousins to read the

series; when they eventually succeed, they realize that these newcomers to the series are less enthusiastic, less committed.

Whether *Harry Potter* will endure the test of time is, to be honest, of very little concern to me. I believe that contemporary culture must be made available to university students and discussed in class with as much passion as the culture of the past. I myself love teaching Victorian Literature but would not have missed the chance of teaching *Harry Potter*, once I made up my mind, for all the gold in the world. It has paid off, believe me. For a teacher, there's nothing better than learning *from* her or his students and *with* them, and this is what is happening to me this memorable spring term of 2014.

Enjoy...

Bellaterra, 23 May 2014

Chris Arms

My first experience of *Harry Potter* came when I was only 6 or 7 years old. My sister's teacher had suggested it to her class and my Dad took it upon himself to read *The Philosopher's Stone* to my sister and I every night before going to sleep. Some of my earliest memories are of Harry's first potions class, and I was immediately terrified by Snape. I remember picturing myself in my own school standing over a cauldron with my Headmistress, who was equally terrifying to me as Snape, judging me and berating my efforts. I was able to immediately feel a connection with Harry as I attended a public school with a house system, house points, house sports and so on. I was also told several times that I looked like Harry, with dark hair and glasses, and I remember dressing up as him when my school held a dress as your favourite book character day.

I read the 2nd and 3rd books at school as the series was starting to gain popularity in the UK but I feel that it was with *The Goblet of Fire* that I really fell in love with the series. I remember hardly putting down the book and being struck particularly hard by the death of Cedric Diggory, mostly due to the seemingly nonchalant way in which he was killed. I felt that this was a real turning point in the series, as this was the killing of an innocent character and the first time we had truly seen the evil of Voldemort rather than just hearing about it. This was one of the first real instances that I could think of in a children's books when I had read of a character being killed in such a way, although as the series continued I was going to find out that it was not the last.

I remember the long wait between the 4th and 5th books and used this opportunity to re-read the series. My original books have been handled so many times that they are practically unreadable now, with the covers and many of the pages haven fallen out due to the heavy use. After the 3 year wait I remember *The Order of the Phoenix* arriving in the post on the release date and sitting in my garden reading the book for two straight days. Like most other people I was left both confused and hurt by yet another seemingly pointless death, that of Sirius. I tried to hold out some hope that his death was not final, what with the ambiguous nature of his death but by now I was starting to understand that death was going to play a fairly important role in the book, and that not all of it would necessary going to make sense or could be justified.

One of my favourite characters throughout the whole series was Snape, as I could never understand why he always seemed to dislike Harry so much and the fact that whatever he did his trustworthiness was always questioned and so we were never able to form a proper judgement on him. This was never truer than in *The Half-Blood Prince* which opens with Snape taking the unbreakable vow that he will help Draco. I had always rooted for Snape and wanted him desperately to be a good character and so felt deeply betrayed at the end of the book when he kills Dumbledore. For me this was the saddest part of the whole series, as Dumbledore was always the beacon of hope, Harry's mentor and parental figure that he always needed. More importantly he

had repeatedly declared that he had the upmost faith in Snape and so for him to kill Dumbledore made it even more heart-breaking.

For the release of *The Deathly Hallows* my sister, my cousin and myself had decided we wanted to enjoy the full experience and so we decided to dress up as wizards, with a stick from our garden rather than a wand, and waited for the release of the book at midnight at our local bookstore. It was here that you could really see the popularity of the series as more than 100 people were queued up outside of this small bookstore. There was a real mix of people there, from children waiting with their parents to friends in their 20's and 30's. Although deeply saddened by what once again seemed like gratuitous and pointless death at the Battle of Hogwarts, I took great pleasure in us finally finding out the truth about Snape and that we could say that he was a good character and the rise of Neville, who was so often portrayed as stupid or clueless, becoming one of the main heroes.

I felt that the series resounded particularly strongly with me, especially after I started attending a boarding school when I was 13. I was able to easily draw parallels between my school and Hogwarts, with the House system playing an extremely important part in my everyday life, sleeping in a dormitory for my 1st year, the exam system which closely resembles the British education and exam systems and so on. Like so many other people of my age I felt that like I grew up alongside Harry and this was never more true than when I went to boarding school and was able to truly experience some of what happened in Harry's world, although my school experience wasn't quite able to live up to that of Harry's.

Alba Arnau

The first time I came into contact with the *Harry Potter* Series was in a school trip in 2001. We went to the cinema to see the movie *Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone* in Catalan. I am sure that there were some kids in my class that were already reading the books, but I was not a fan of reading, back then. I think I really liked the movie, even though I do not remember what exactly my impression was. I was 9 years old.

I am lucky enough to have an uncle that works in a printing press. Some time after this trip, he brought me a pile of books and one of them was *Philosopher's Stone*. I was really disappointed with it. The problems were that I was not used to reading and that I had watched the film first. I remember complaining to my mother that I was on page 60 (in reality, it was page 20 or 30) and they had not gone to the zoo yet. The action was too slow for me.

I was 12 or so when I gave the book another try. I had become quite the reader by then and I had a friend that absolutely loved the *Harry Potter* books. He told me that the third book was the best one and, as I had been watching the movies, I started

there with a Catalan translation. I read the fourth, fifth and sixth also in Catalan. I remember reading that a fan had translated a version of the seventh book, and then buying it when it finally was officially translated. A year or two ago, I re-read them all, this time starting from the beginning. Before that I recall liking them, but after the re-read I absolutely love them. Rowling writes in a way that is totally engaging; you are hooked and want to keep on reading until the end.

I have to say that I have not read them in English yet and I do not know if I will. I am a huge advocator of reading books in their original language if you understand it. However, I think that the Catalan translation is wonderful. I am in love with the use of the vocabulary in the series. I am even a little afraid that I will not like them as much as I do in Catalan, because they will not be in my native language.

The *Harry Potter* series has been an experience for me. Firstly, I still meet friends from my old school to re-watch the movies with them. Our schedules hardly coincide because of our jobs and studies, yet we find the time because we have so much fun. We comment on the parts we like best and make fun of the characters. Secondly, it was the series that introduced me to fan fiction. Fan fiction, and fandom in general, is pretty important to me. If I like a story or I see some part of it that has potential (such as setting or some character), I will look for and read fan fiction of it. However, currently, I am not really involved in the Harry Potter fandom, even if I still re-read some of my favourite *Harry Potter* movies.

The part of the fandom that I read is highly critical of the series and the author, which has made me be more critical of it. Unfortunately, this has made me discover that some parts of the series do not sit well with me. I do not like at all that Dumbledore left Harry with abusive family members. Even if he could not have known, he should have checked that he was okay growing up. I am not at all an expert, but I think that Harry should have had more (or more evident) psychological damage due to his childhood environment. I do not like how Snape seems to be forgiven for everything that he did by the end of the series: that includes being a Death Eater and his abusive behaviour towards Neville and the other students. I wish there was a more diverse cast, being a series with so many characters.

Nonetheless, I still love a lot of things about it. I love Harry and Ron's friendship (that is undermined in the movies). I love Harry and Hermione's friendship and how it does not develop into a love triangle with Ron. I love the setting and the magic. I love the epic battle of good and evil. I love the plots and the style of the narrative. I really like the little we know about the classes they take.

I have always enjoyed fantasy, so I do not think that just *Harry Potter* made me keep on reading the same genre. However, there are some books that I relate to it because I read them at the same early age and love them for similar reasons. *His Dark Materials* by Phillip Pullman, which has an extraordinary setting and characters that I love. *The Barthimaeus Trilogy* by Jonathan Stroud, which despite not having as diverse a cast as *Materials*, is still very engaging, with a very different take on magic and power.

Sara Bello Serrano

The first time I knew about the existence of Harry Potter was in 2001, when the first film was released. I was 10 years old and all my friends spent many days letting me know about how fantastic the books and the new film on Harry Potter were and they could not understand why I was not in touch with the saga yet. I thought that they might be right and I finally convinced my mother to go to the cinema on a Friday afternoon to watch the movie.

I went to the cinema to watch *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and I was really shocked, since I had never seen the place as full of people as it was. I watched the film and I instantly became a huge Harry Potter fan, at least with that film. Even my mother became a fan of that film, and we decided that it would be a great idea to buy and read all the books, even the first one. Although we had already seen the film, we knew that the book was going to tell the story with much more details, as it usually happens.

I had never liked reading books. However, I started reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and I enjoyed its reading a lot. In spite of the fact that I already knew how the story of that book was going to develop, I felt that I could not stop reading it. Since I was highly hooked on the story. I finished the book in just one week.

The following months I highly enjoyed reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Moreover, I loved the fact that my mother was reading the books as well, since I could comment with her everything that was taking place and that was surprising me.

Two years went by and in 2003 the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, was finally published. I used to spend my summers in Cambrils but I used to be very bored, since I did not know anybody and I felt a bit alone. All my friends spent the summer in places where they had hundreds of friends and I wished to meet someone. However, I was only 12 years old and meeting friends was not easy for me, since I was pretty shy. I remember that my best friend that summer was that fifth *Harry Potter* book. I went everywhere with the book (beach, swimming pool...) and I wanted the book never to finish.

I never stopped going to the cinema to watch the *Harry Potter* films. I did not go to the cinema just once: I used to watch the same film between six and eight times. Of course, I also bought all the films to watch them again at home.

I also joined a forum in 2003 called 'Harrylatino' where I met many people my age who loved Harry Potter's world as well. I enjoyed very much the existence of that forum and I spent many afternoons at home talking about *Harry Potter* events in that website. If I must be honest, I even left my studies a bit aside because that website got me highly addicted.

Many years went on and I continued reading the novels that were being published and watching the films that were being released in the cinema. The last book was published in 2007, when I was 17 years old, and I read it with the same enthusiasm that I used to read the first novels with when I was younger. However, in the last book some events which disappointed me a bit took place, and I was kind of sad about some aspects. I was a teenager and I was experiencing a not very good moment in my life, so maybe that is the reason why some sad events of that book saddened me more than usual.

The last film was released in 2011 and I felt deeply sad, since I knew that no more novels or films were going to be produced. I hated the fact that the last film was split into two parts because the waiting became annoying for me. Although I understand that the film was very long, I think it would have been better to make a very long film. We, huge fans of Harry Potter, would not have found too long at all.

I have travelled three times to London. In 2008 I went with my whole family to spend some days there and the first thing we did was going to King's Cross Station to take a picture on platform 9¾, place where some events of the film took place. In 2011 and 2013 I went there with my friends and my boyfriend and I took pictures there again. The last time I went to King's Cross Station a *Harry Potter* shop had been built next to that platform. Inside the shop, everything about *Harry Potter* can be found, such as brooms, the magic wands of all the characters, posters or key rings. It is a good place to visit because it is great fun.

This year 2014 I am also in touch with Harry Potter's world in some aspects. First of all, I am taking in Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona a subject called 'Cultural Studies in English: The *Harry Potter* Series', which I am enjoying a lot. Secondly, I am trying to include Harry Potter's world as a main topic for the summer camps 2014 in the English School where I work. I think it is a good way to let children know about Harry Potter and the world of magic. It could be funny for children to try to make fancy dresses as witches and wizards, create their own magic wands, hats, brooms and invisibility cloaks.

Besides, I am going to spend Easter in Edinburgh and one of places I most wish to visit is Alnwick Castle, a place where many scenes in the *Harry Potter* movies were shot.

I have got a brother who is now 13 years old and he enjoys *Harry Potter*. However, he has not experienced the *Harry Potter* 'boom' and he does not like it as much as I do. He has not read the novels and I have in mind trying to convince him to do so. In contrast, I have got a sister-in-law who is a huge fan of Harry Potter and she is only 15 years old. She has not experienced the 'boom' of *Harry Potter*, either, but she enjoys the novels and the films as much as I did when I was younger. I find this striking, as I have not met many children of that age who are fans of these series.

I have enjoyed almost everything in my readings of *Harry Potter*. It is a very good story which I read when I was a child. Now that I am an adult, I try to understand why I enjoyed so much this story, and I realize that Harry's is a world every child in the world would want to belong to. Hogwarts is a place full of magic, where the stairs move and change direction, where the pictures speak to you, where you have great dinners and, most important, you are without parents. Moreover, Hermione, Ron and Harry are real friends and they also have to face enemies together, but their friendship is very strong and I really liked that they were actual friends and helped so much each other in all occasions.

The plot of the story is a bit difficult to follow because there are many characters who deal with so many different stories that when you are a child you might feel a bit lost. However, Rowling's ability to recall particular facts or situations makes the reading of the story understandable for children too. Now that I am an adult and I have read the novels again, I pay attention to many details and I understand many things that I misunderstood when I was younger. I have not read Rowling's other works although I will probably do it someday.

I think that the reading of *Harry Potter* has had a great impact on me. I grew up with this series and it made me feel many sensations. After the reading of this series, I think I will never find another novel about magic or fantasy which makes me feel so hooked on its story. I will try as much as I can to make my students or, in case I have them, my sons or daughters, read this story and share with them the pleasure of reading it.

Lara Blasco Solís

My first contact with Harry Potter may be disappointing for students within this elective since I first learned about the *Harry Potter* series through the first movie in 2001 instead of the book. I have to say though, that thanks to that magic day I entered in the amazing world of Harry Potter.

I remember that day as it was just like yesterday. I had just turned 13, I was in the fourth year in school and it was nearly Christmas. The school decided to take us to the cinema to watch *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which at that time was not so famous among my friends. I myself didn't know about it until that day and I don't know why, since I have always loved fantasy. All of us were very excited because teachers told us a bit about what the film was about. At the very moment the film started I was hooked on its story, the magic environment, everything.

I loved the film so much that I decided that I had to read the novel in order to know everything about Harry and his story, because obviously books are always much better than films. However, it was not until my birthday, the following year, that I finally got the books. My aunt and one of my parents' friends bought me three books,

but since they didn't mention this to each other two of these books were copies of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*; I immediately exchanged one for the third book, of course. I read books one and two in less than two weeks because we were going to the cinema to see the second film and I wanted to know the whole story. I read them so fast also because I couldn't stop reading, obviously.

After watching the film, I started again the books so that I could read them from the very beginning, slow but steady. I used to read at nights before going to sleep and I remember waiting all the day anxiously to continue with the story. Once I was reading, I didn't want to go to sleep and every day my parents were angry with me because it was always too late; it was funny. I had a contradictory feeling, because I wanted to read more and at the same time I didn't want the story to end. I read the first three books by December and I immediately bought the fourth one.

I just couldn't stop reading. I was 14, the same age as Harry in *Goblet of Fire* and I had the feeling that we were growing up together. He definitely became a part of my childhood. I became one of those fans who waited for hours to have the new book on my hands. Unfortunately, I had to wait for two years, which seemed so long, to be able to buy *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* once it was published in Spain (2004).

During that period without a new book, I re-read the ones I had. I don't know how many times I read book 4, which was my favourite, because for me that was the best one of the published ones and the beginning of the most interesting part of the series. We were able to see Voldemort, finally! I have used it so many times that the poor thing is a bit destroyed in fact.

The day arrived and I finally got *Order of the Phoenix* and as time went by, I also bought *Half-Blood Prince*. I must say that I was so shocked when I read that '*Avada Kevadra*' coming from Snape and Dumbledore falling from the tower that I had to read it again to be able to understand what had just happened. I couldn't believe that Dumbledore was dead! He was just gone and he left Harry with no instructions, please! Obviously, I waited impatiently for the last book of the series, spending my free time re-reading the series from book four onwards.

When finally I got the last book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, I read it in less than a week. I think I did it in three or four days indeed. I had waited for that book for years, imagining what would happen and how, but at the end, when I read the ending... Oh my God how disappointing it was! I hate the way Voldemort just dies because of no apparently reason, just because, surprise, his wand was Harry's. I had been reading about Harry's classes and about the spells he learnt every year and at the end he just uses *Expelliarmus*. It really bothers me. And I don't want to talk about that epilogue; seriously.

However, despite the fact that I may hate the ending of the series, I love it. I grew up with Harry and I spent lots of hours sharing his adventures. Harry Potter has

been part of my childhood. It is in fact part of my life, because whenever I have some free time in which I don't know what to do, I take one of the books and I start again.

Last year, I heard that one of my teachers was asking for students who wanted to take a subject on *Harry Potter*. I immediately emailed her, asking for a 'position' because that was such an amazing thing that I had to participate on it. Moreover, I decided to write my TFG (or BA dissertation) about Harry Potter and a topic that, as I grew up I started to consider: his heroism. I thank her for giving us, Potterheads, this chance.

In order to participate in the subject we had to re-read the books, once again, and prepare them for the subject. I had read the books for at least more than 10 times, but not from the very beginning, always from book four. I was surprised while reading when I saw that I had changed my opinion, not about the series, but about the first books. Now they were very childish and simple for me, it took me some time to read them because I was even bored at some points. I suppose that it is because I've grown up. My opinion regarding book four onwards was the same fortunately. Maybe now that we are dealing with the series in depth I'll start to hate them, who knows.

Thanks to *Harry Potter* I love even more fantastic literature and I started to read more complex series. I've read Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* and now I am, I must say, obsessed with *A Song of Ice and Fire* by Martin. I have read all the books, which are already published of course, and now I am waiting impatiently for the next one. I consider these two series the best ones ever, and my favourite ones with no doubt. Regarding *Harry Potter*, this may be of a lower category than the ones I have just mentioned, since it is much more simple than the others, but it will be always one of my favourites.

Laura Calvo Zafra

As a child I liked reading, but I wasn't what you would call a 'bookworm'. I would rather play with my toys, watch some cartoons or annoy my brother until he played with me. However, at home I had a good role model when it came to reading: my mother. Since I can recall I've always seen her with a book in her hands, and that made me really curious about what it was about books that my mum could not stop reading them.

From time to time I would go with her to a bookshop and I would go to the children's section to browse among the books. It usually was the nice drawings in the covers that caught my eye and I would ask my mother to tell me what the book was about. Sometimes I asked her to buy me a book and she would always do it, for she was happy that I finally had decided to read a book that I had chosen and not the books that I had to read for school. But I would usually leave them unread because my toys were far more interesting at the time. My brother was the one who had been haunted

by the magic of reading; he was the one who would also try to be always with a book in his hands. And one day that book was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

For me it was just another of the books that my brother liked, for him it was a new world of possibilities. He wouldn't stop talking about it; I even started to dislike the book just because he would never shut his mouth. But then the first film came out. I was 8 at the time and my brother 11, he was more excited than me, but I also wanted to watch it and finally discover what all the fuss was about. One night, as a surprise, my parents took us to the cinema to see it. That was one of the best nights of my life, it was just perfect.

I left the cinema overexcited; I couldn't stop talking about the movie, and I waited years for my letter to arrive (it was a disappointment when I turned eleven and I still wasn't sent one.). However, watching the film didn't make me want to read the book. At the time, I felt that it was a silly thing to read the book when I already knew what had happened, even though my brother insisted that the book had more things to offer me.

The years went by and I kept watching the films and not reading the books. But when I was 13 I started to have a bad time at school, I didn't talk about it but I felt terrible. That summer I started reading properly. The book that helped me start this wonderful trip was *Laura y el Secreto de Aventerra*, which I adored. I also fell in love with *Molly Moon*, a recommendation from my brother, and I couldn't wait to read more. So one day I went into my brother's room to see which book I could borrow and there they were: the *Harry Potter* books. I thought that I could give them a chance and I took the four first books with me when my family and I went to the countryside.

I felt a bit reluctant at first, I thought that if I had already watched the films the books would be boring because I already knew everything, but oh how wrong I was. By the second chapter of the first book I was already absorbed, I couldn't stop reading, I would read since I woke up until I went to bed, just stopping to eat or when my parents asked me to do something in the house or to go with them outside. In seven days I read the first four books and as soon as I got home again I started reading the fifth one (even though it was a bit harder to read than the others).

My favourite character was Hermione, from the beginning. I already liked her from the films, but reading the books I loved her even more. Since I was starting to read more and more I felt like I wanted to be like her, as clever and as confident. I also felt that I could relate to her when it came to the other students not being nice to her at school, at least in the first book. And I wanted to be more confident, and in that moment she gave me strength to carry on. Two other characters I fell in love with and I still adore were Remus Lupin and Sirius Black. I don't really remember why, but I do remember wondering why they did not have as many scenes as other characters had, even when eventually Sirius got his moments of glory. My favourite book was and still is *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, no need to say that Lupin, Sirius and Hermione play an important part in my liking of the book. I also had a soft spot for George and Fred

Weasley, and I will never get over Fred's death and George being alone. I will not say I hate Rowling for it, but every time I think about it I feel the rage in my veins.

One of the things I liked most about the books was that they made me feel lots of different emotions. Sometimes it was hope, some others fear, sometimes excitement and sorrow, sometimes repulsion, some other times adoration and the list carries on. Hope I felt for the characters but also for myself; fear I felt sometimes when I read terrible things about the Dementors or the scene in *Deathly Hallows* in Godric's Hollow when Harry goes to see his parents' house and Nagini attacks him and Hermione. Excitement and sorrow were something constant; repulsion, I think, was centred in Umbridge and Voldemort. Since the series gave me such different emotions it became more special to me and I felt more like a part of it.

As a fan, this saga is one of the best things I've ever read, and I've lost track of how many times I've re-read the books. I do not have much merchandising and I haven't written any fan fiction, however, last November I had one of the greatest Potterhead experiences of my life. When I went to London with some friends we decided to go to the *Harry Potter* experience in the Warner Studios Studio Tour. When we crossed the doors of the Great Salon my eyes couldn't stop crying. I felt like I was going home. I will not say anything about the place because I don't want to spoil the visit to anyone, I just want to say that it was one of the best afternoons of my life and everything was perfect. Not only as a Potterhead but also as a fan of cinema, it was incredible. Before we left I brought one of the things I've always wanted to have: my own Gryffindor scarf, since Gryffindor is my House. I also wanted to buy a wand, but I could not decide between Hermione's or Sirius's, and I could not afford one, to be honest. I had to choose between the wand and the scarf and the colours of my house ended winning the fight, but one day my fan heart will not be able to resist it and my hands will finally have a wand.

It is true that now that I'm looking at the series from an academic perspective some things are a bit disappointing. It is hard to leave your fan's passion aside and have a critical perspective, especially when you find things you didn't realise before and you don't like at all. But *Harry Potter* is and will always be an important part of my life, something that brings magic and hope to my child and adult self. After the series I've kept reading fantastic literature, which is one of my favourite genres. Just after *Harry Potter* I found *Septimus*, *Narnia*, *His Dark Materials* and many others. When I grew up a bit more I read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and I think the Middle Earth shares the same important place in my heart as Hogwarts. I'm still in the process of reading more by Tolkien, finishing the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and discovering more and more wonderful works.

Rubén Campos Arjona

It all began some thirteen years ago. It was a hot, boring summer –the kind which you only remember as such when you are older– when I came across an odd purple book with an old bearded man on the cover. As I would learn later, it was a book my mum had bought for my father for some reason I cannot now recall. So, having nothing better to do, I started reading a story about a man with a magical lighter and a kid with a lightning-shaped scar.

Little did I know that I would spend the rest of that summer holiday waiting for my letter from Hogwarts and dreaming about wands and spells and all the secret knowledge that Harry, Ron and Hermione were being taught and I was not. So strong was my wish to become a wizard that I ended up thinking I was able to magically move objects... even if those objects were only tiny pieces of cereal and even if that ‘magic’ was only the result of static electricity doing its job.

I read the next three books as soon as I grabbed hold on them. I remember not liking *The Chamber of Secrets* very much, but somehow being mesmerized by the mysterious diary and its even more mysterious inhabitant. I remember the shock that was for me Harry’s near death (at that time I was still a kid and as such I still liked Harry that much... though looking back I could not really say why). And of course, I remember hating with all my heart and the borrowed rage of all the male characters the stupid, incompetent and obvious fraud Gilderoy Lockhart (seriously, girls, how could you NOT notice? Not even you Hermione? Well, never mind...).

But what I remember most and with a clarity that still today amazes me is the way I became infatuated with Sirius’s story, the enigmatic prison of Azkaban and those horrifying and disgusting (yet extremely interesting) things that were the Dementors. I remember being ill in bed and the faint light of a little lamp guiding me through the pages, being possessed with an urge to keep reading until there was no more book to read and I was left with that empty feeling that can’t by any means be appeased.

What followed after that was a little older me rushing through the fourth book, being overwhelmed by mystery after mystery as Harry made his way through the Three Wizards Tournament and things got tougher and tougher until the very end, when the first and true *Avada Kedavra!* (*Obitus per subitum!* in my edition) in all the series was uttered and Cedric Diggory fell dead to the ground. It was at that moment that I realized that ‘shit was starting to get real’ and that perhaps what I was now reading was no longer so childish and innocent and that, perhaps, I was no longer the child that had found that odd book with a bearded man on the cover.

As Harry and crew grew older, so did I, and as pages and deaths and books went by all I could think about was why the damn post-service hadn’t delivered my Hogwarts letter yet and how it would all end. Looking back, I now realize that what I most missed about Hogwarts (and somehow I still do) was not the adventure and the

magic, but rather the place itself, the many corridors the characters had already visited and all those secret places no one had been able to find yet. In a way, I also missed not being able to be there, not with them, but rather making my own friends, learning my own spells and reading all those interesting books all of them had access to and I only knew the tittles of.

Books V, VI and VII went faster than I would have liked them too. All I wanted to do was read and know more, know the details that the pages didn't cover, travel to the places the novels didn't actually describe and meet the characters I'd never get to meet. As events unfolded, I could discern that that was no longer a novel for children. Sirius's death struck me as too fast and final, too unbelievable quick and unpredictable to be true. Yet it was. What I didn't know then (but I had already started to suspect) was that that was only one of the many deaths and sacrifices Harry and friends would have to face until all could be over. Dumbledore, Snape, Dobby, all of them dead and gone forever, vanished from a tale that got darker and darker as pages went by.

I must admit that *The Deadly Hallows* was my favourite book. I couldn't really say why, but perhaps it was because it was darker, cruder and somehow felt more alive (to me) than the previous ones. People were dying, a war was being waged, and there was no choice but to pick up a side and fight.

I will not comment on the end. Not that I found it to be particularly good or bad or anything (in fact, at that moment, I thought it to be the more epic scene I'd read in my entire and short life), but many things have already been said about it. I'll only say that in the last few years I've started to develop some sort of undiagnosed allergy to all words bearing the slightest resemblance to the word *Expelliarmus*.

Jokes aside, I must confess that I truly enjoyed the final battle in the castle, even if it reminded me of all the absences Harry had had to learn to deal with and even if it meant having to say good bye to some more friends I'll never forget (Remus, Tonks: why?). And the epilogue. I shamelessly admit that I liked the epilogue because it offered me something that I was never going to get ever again. It offered me more: more pages, more time with them, more before the final "All was well" appeared and everything ended forever.

For a time, I was empty. I was a nineteen year old teenager, lying on his bed, almost on the brink of tears for a bunch of fictional characters I had never met but I could not make my mind to say goodbye to. So I did the only logical and rational thing anyone in my position would have done and started reading the books again. Backwards.

I relived every single death, I re-read every detail of every description saying "whoa" and "wow" and "clever" every time I noticed what and why J.K. had done in some particular situations. But as novels went by and I got closer to the beginning (which was also a sort of end) I realized that I couldn't feel the way I used to feel towards the characters. The closer I got to that fateful night in Privet Drive 4, the less I felt towards the characters and the flatter and less interesting they seemed to me. It

was only then that I realized how unbelievably lucky I had been to be able to grow with them, and learn with them in what had been the most incredible journey I had ever experienced.

I've been in countless other journeys since then. After *Harry Potter*, fantasy and I became close friends and I started to go on adventures in the Forgotten Realms by the hand of R.A. Salvatore and his *Dark Elf* trilogy, I met other famous mages like Elminster and I travelled to other unknown and equally interesting places with the help of Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weiss and their *Darksword* series... until I read *Ender's Game* and everything changed yet again (but as they say, "that's another story").

To the disappointment of my younger self, I didn't get my letter that first summer, or the next, or the following one (in fact I'm still waiting). But somehow, after all these years, some part of me feels as if I had already been there, wandering corridors I've only seen in films (and sometimes dreams), reading books I've never touched the pages of and yelling lots of nonsense but nonetheless cool words to make some sparks appear at the tip of a wand that will never work (though not for lack of trying, believe me).

To whoever made this possible, I can only say: thank you.

Marta Canals Sánchez

I still remember that summer day in 2000. I was bored, at home, watching TV. *Info K*, a news program for kids, was being broadcast. I was not really paying attention to it, but suddenly the cultural section, my favourite one, started. The reporter talked about the fourth book of the *Harry Potter* series, which was published on that day in Spain.

I had never heard about the series before, but the summary that they gave about it was interesting. I immediately asked my mother if she could buy me at least the first book. The following week, she gave me the first three books as a present.

I have to admit that, despite the fact that I insisted on having them, I did not like the books at first. Maybe it was because I was only seven and they were too complicated, but I think that the main reason was that my mother, who read them to me, insisted on pronouncing "Dumbledore", "Privet Drive" and all the English words as they were written, and that annoyed me. The books ended up being forgotten, but I kept reading other books, because I really enjoyed reading.

More than one year later, one of my friends at school invited me to her birthday party. We went to the cinema to see *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. When I returned home, I looked for the books because I liked the movie, and I

wanted to give them another try. I immediately fell in love, and as soon as I finished the third book, I went to buy *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

I was going through a really hard time. My parents got divorced a couple of years before, and reading was the only thing that kept me away from a reality where I did not want to be. From my point of view as a child, the world where the plot took place was even more magic than the books explained. I think that this is why I started to like the series so much.

I was so addicted to the books, that I talked about them to everyone, including my own family. My aunts had always been avid readers, and Viole, one of them, started to be interested on the books, so she told me that she would try to read them too.

In 2003, when *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was published in Spain, I had already read it in English. I was too anxious to wait for it to be translated into Spanish. The one who lend me the book was my aunt, who was as desperate and addicted as me. I even think that she started to learn English to be able to understand the books.

My love for the books just kept growing. When I was ten, I dressed up as a Hogwarts student for Carnival. It was really funny because everybody thought that I was a Weasley (because of my red hair).

I kept on reading the books as soon as they were published, and I also went to see the movies to the cinema on the day of the premiere. I still remember how I cried when I opened *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and I read “and to you, if you have stuck with Harry until the very end”.

It was 2007, I was fourteen. *Harry Potter* was not only part of my childhood, but I also had a very strong emotional link to the series. It helped me a lot when I was a child, and it kept helping my through my adolescence. Whenever I felt down, I used to grab one of the books, and read it, because simply doing this calmed me and made me happy. I think that it was around that time when I started my tradition of reading the whole series twice a year, for Christmas and in summer.

I also was really excited when I went to see the *Deathly Hallows I and II* to the cinema the same day, it was a special offer to celebrate the premiere of the last movie. Then, I started another tradition, the 24-hours *Harry Potter* marathon, something that I do once a year.

One of my biggest hopes is that, one day, my brothers will also enjoy this series as much as I did, and I still do. They are seven now, the same age that I was when I tried to read the books for the same time. They do not have as much interest in books as I had when I was their age, but I really want them to enter one day my room at home, see the books, wonder what they are about and give them a try. Probably,

when they turn eleven, I will try to recommend the books to them if they have not taken the first step by themselves.

As I have said before, I enjoyed the books because they made me feel better. I think that Rowling has an incredible ability to make you enter into the story without paying attention to anything else. The *Harry Potter* series are addictive and wonderful, I can spend hours reading the books without eating or even looking at the clock. When I was a child, I liked the books because they made me feel that, even if your situation is miserable, good things can happen to you. Now I enjoy with them because I have really sweet memories of the books, I think that they are very well written and that the plot is simply amazing.

What I do not like is something that I realized when I was fourteen or fifteen. At that time, I began to be interested in homoerotic fiction, and when I re-read the books, I could not help wondering why there were no homosexual couples in them. Yes, Dumbledore is gay, perfect. But, what about the students? Hogwarts is enormous, and a lot of people study there, why are there no gay or lesbian couples? I do not ask the author to write explicit stories about those couples, but it would be more natural and realistic if from time to time the characters said: “X is going out with X” or “Y and Y are together”, as they already do with heterosexual couples. This would help children to understand better same-sex couples.

Last summer I read *The Casual Vacancy*, and I managed to finish it. I did not like it. First of all, it was a bit weird for me to read a book that was written by J.K. Rowling and that talked about sex, drugs, masturbation and so on. It may sound childish, but I felt it was something similar to a betrayal to my childhood memories. Plus, the characters were all hateful, and I do not think that it is the best genre for her as writer. The truth is that *Harry Potter* opened the door for my interest in fantasy and gothic. They are my favourite genres not only for books, but also for anime. I have read a lot of books that belong to fantasy, including *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *The Kingkiller Chronicle* (where *The Name of the Wind* belongs), *The Lord of the Rings*, *Eragon*, *Las Crónicas de Idhún*, *Dark Materials*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Neverending Story*, etc. And I will continue being faithful to this genre. I love the worlds where these books take me when I open them.

Melissa Caro Lanchó

I don't remember whether I first learned about *Harry Potter* myself or if it was because of my aunt, who's a keen reader and may have told my parents about these books. I do remember my parents bought the first four books as a Christmas gift my last year in primary school, so I was around 11 years old, same age as Harry's. I don't remember how quickly I read the books but I can tell I did it in a very short span of time, because I was still in school when I had read already finished reading them.

I was already an avid reader at the time, and every fortnight I would go to the Bibliobús (a bus with books you can borrow, since in my town there is no public library) to take books to read; and for a few months I would only read *Harry Potter*, re-reading them again when I finished *Goblet of Fire* and leaving the Bibliobús books aside for a while. They were in Catalan, which would also make me read the rest of the series in Catalan except for the last one, and they were probably the thickest books I had ever read when I was 11. Until then I had been reading books from the publishing house *Vaixell de Vapor* and other children's books.

The shock I received from the Harry Potter series was huge, to the point that I created a fan club in my town, creating a Gryffindor common room in my own garage (with a very badly drawn picture of the Fat Lady made by myself on the entrance), organizing activities on the weekends and even booklets with information about the subjects we could take as if we were in Hogwarts, which to my dismay didn't have much success. I didn't know what being a fan meant, the club wasn't even called 'fan club', but I knew that I loved the series. That love affair, if you can call it that, carried on in high school, even though I don't recall conversations with friends about *Harry Potter*. At some point, though I must have talked to them about it because many enjoy the series, although I must say that only one of them shares such enthusiasm with me.

As for the films, I don't remember going to the cinema to watch them, but I do have *Philosopher's Stone* in VHS, again a present from my father for one of my birthdays. Around 2003-2004, when the fifth book came out in Spain, I went to the local newsagent first thing on a Saturday morning to buy *Order of the Phoenix*, afraid that it might be sold out. I was surprised to know that only I and two other people in the town had specifically requested the book, and it was obvious to me that although many people enjoyed the series, not many in my town did.

I don't remember at what time of the year the book came out, but it must have been around Christmas because I was reading about Sirius Black's death at my grandma's house, and shouted a very loud "No!" as I kept reading, ignoring the rest of my family. Through the years my family would laugh at me because every summer I would take one of the *Harry Potter* books on holidays, especially *Prisoner of Azkaban* which continues to be my favourite, and they would always see one of the books on my bedside table.

When I was 15-16 years old several things happened. The first one was meeting through the internet a person who, without knowing it, would become one of my best friends. We share many tastes but what brought us together was a passion for *Harry Potter* and slash fan fiction; which, in its turn, was one of the most important things that have influenced me as a reader. I found out what it was out of the blue, started reading without really knowing anything. Yet since the moment I submerged myself into the wonders of reading and, later, writing fan fiction (and more specifically slash fan fiction), the *Harry Potter* books and fan fiction would always go together, hand by hand.

So far, I had made clear my passion for *Harry Potter* and all my friends and family knew about it. My love was not secret and I remember even being mocked in class when I first had to wear glasses because, unconsciously, I had chosen an oval pair of glasses that were similar to the ones Harry uses. Those episodes, however, were rare and most of the time I carried on with my passion on my own or sharing it with friends, both in person and on the internet. So when *Half-Blood Prince* came out, which I would usually have started reading by myself, something changed: I met with my best friend and we started reading it together, making the experience of reading even more special.

The seventh book was given to me by the same friend, who had gone to the US to spend the summer, and queued alongside many other US Potter fans to bring me the book instead of the typical *I love NY* T-shirt. When I finished chapter 33 “The Prince’s Tale” I went back and read it three more times, going through the same emotional rollercoaster every time over Snape’s tragic story and refusing to continue because I didn’t want to finish the series. In fact, while I had devoured the last six books, I delayed reading the last one until I couldn’t wait to see how it ended.

The last films were a sort of a closure to an era. For *Deathly Hallows Part 1* my friends and I decided to go to London. The original plan was to go to the premiere, but it didn’t work out because of the dates so we decided watch the film there instead. During that trip an anecdote happened that turned up to decide my destination for the Erasmus programme: I was in charge of the tickets for the cinema and when I bought them on the website I got confused, not knowing of the existence of a city called Leicester, so I bought them thinking it was Leicester Square. Our nerves were on edge when we realized that Leicester was three hours away from London and there was literally no way we could get there in time. We eventually got our money back and could buy new tickets for the following session, but that will always remain in my mind because when I saw that one of the possible destinations for the Erasmus program was Leicester I thought it was destiny, and so I went. All that thanks to *Harry Potter*.

With *Deathly Hallows Part 2* there was a feeling that a part of my life that was ending. Of course we would have fan fiction but there would be no more books, films or premieres; and that was hugely emotional for me. So many things had happened during those years, I had met so many people, but that door was closing and I felt incredibly sad. That day indeed felt like closure.

I can say that reading *Harry Potter* and watching the films has changed me in so many ways I can’t yet begin to understand. The books made me the person and the avid reader I am today, since I liked spending my free time reading. At the time *Harry Potter* opened my eyes to much more literature beyond the *Vaixell de Vapor* books. As I grew up, I discovered new literature but I have to say that until Jane Austen’s Mr. Darcy came into my life when I was 16 my mind was still focused on *Harry Potter*.

I have read *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, and even tried (and failed) to read *The Silmarillion*, but even though I absolutely love Tolkien’s Middle Earth it didn’t quite have the same effect on me that *Harry Potter* had. More recently I have been

reading Young Adult literature, for instance John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. My own attempts at writing have resulted in young adult fiction with –strangely– some fantasy and time-travelling involved; but fantasy is not my first choice for reading. Perhaps *Harry Potter* was just once in a lifetime and fantasy is not really my cup of tea, maybe it's simply that I haven't been inclined to try a new fantasy book and see what it's like. I'm 'definitely' not shutting doors.

The same happens with Rowling's other books. I started reading *The Casual Vacancy* a few months ago and unlike *Harry Potter*, which hooked me from page one, it has been a bit difficult to keep reading. I plan to finish reading at least this one, maybe I'll even like it once I'm halfway through, but I bear very clearly in mind that although she's the author of *Harry Potter*, this is not *Harry Potter*.

Laia Castañón Abad

I started reading *Harry Potter* when I was around 8 years old. I had always been a relatively avid reader for my age, preferring books to playing even in kindergarten. So when I got *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) as a birthday present, I simply devoured it. Shortly after, I borrowed *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998) from a friend, and although I had really liked both books, I admit I didn't give much thought to the series for a long time after that.

A couple of years later, someone gave me as a present the latest volume then published, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000). With nothing better to do and without having read *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) first, I once again devoured the book, yet forgetting about it once finished. It was not until I read *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) that I truly became an enthusiast of the saga. I started re-reading all the previous books and I finally read *Prisoner of Azkaban* (Sirius's mystery was obviously spoilt for me, but I had fallen in love so much with this character in the fourth and fifth books that I didn't even care for that). Most of all, I kept re-reading *Phoenix* again and again until my copy of the book started to literally fall apart.

That's when I became a part of the *Harry Potter* fandom, which enhanced my reading experience very much. I would participate in forums and different webpages and started to write my own fan fiction. It was precisely fan fiction that inspired me and motivated me to write, and in retrospect I realise that even then I loved imagining the little scenes not mentioned in the book or the perspective of secondary characters often overlooked.

Once *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) was published I was a fan from head to toe, and after I read it in Catalan a few times, I decided to borrow it in English. That was the first time I read a non-graded book in English, and while it was a difficult and slow process, it helped me a lot for what was to come. That is, *Harry*

Potter and the Deathly Hallows (2007). The publication of *Hallows* coincided with my last year in secondary school, and I had decided I wanted to do my 'Treball de Recerca' (or graduation project) on *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* as cultural phenomena. The problem was that the translation into Catalan and Spanish would take a few months, and I could not wait to start working on my project if I was to finish it on time, so I read *Deathly Hallows* originally in English. Again it was a difficult task, but it helped me appreciate the books in their original language and gave me enough confidence to pursue my studies as an English major.

As I grew up I distanced myself from the fandom, because finding fan fiction I enjoyed on all levels (not only plot-wise, but also stylistically) became increasingly difficult and time consuming. My dabbling into forums and others also decreased once all seven books were published and there was not any more space for theories about the novels. All this didn't mean I wasn't as much of a fan as I had been, but I was slowly learning to be more critical with the novel. My last reading of the series, between 2013 and early 2014, has only shown me that although I still love *Harry Potter* there are a lot of problematic issues that I now need to address as a mature reader, like for example Rowling's glossing over child abuse in the earlier books ('Where are the social services?' I kept asking myself every time Harry's life with the Dursleys was mentioned).

Things like this are what I really don't enjoy about *Harry Potter*. For example, her treatment of some of the women in the series makes me uncomfortable now, particularly the solid line dividing girls like Lavender Brown and Cho Chang from girls like Hermione and Ginny, or the dichotomy of what 'good' womanhood is supposed to be. I consider the lack of diversity in terms of race and sexual orientation to be another prominent flaw of the series.

Obviously, there are many things I enjoy about *Harry Potter*. I love the Wizarding world created by Rowling. I like the sense of wonder and amazement that is slowly sobered up as Harry grows up and realises the many dark things that happen in his new world. I love the many secondary characters that grow under your skin and who make this series so special, like Sirius, Luna or Neville. I find the way in which Rowling manages to make this series home for so many people and to feel that Hogwarts will always welcome the reader back one of the best things about the novels and probably one of its elements for success.

After reading *Harry Potter* I've read only a few fantasy novels, like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*, by JRR Tolkien, or *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by George Martin. Although these are series I love, I think that fantasy, particularly high fantasy, as a genre attracts me only to a certain extent. For one thing, I've found that the roles of women are very much restricted despite having a completely imaginary setting, and that there is a sort of fanboy protectionism that makes me feel uncomfortable around a lot of fantasy. I feel I have a tendency to choose the novels I read (and more importantly, re-read) according to their women characters, so my favourite books vary in genre, for example *North and South*, *Momo*, *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *Persuasion* or *Mecanoscrit del segon origen*.

Isabel Clúa

Empecé a leer *Harry Potter* en 2001, coincidiendo con el lanzamiento en España de *Harry Potter y el cáliz de fuego*. Conocía desde hacía tiempo la existencia de la saga, pues había aparecido varias veces en los medios de comunicación a raíz de su éxito entre los niños, pero yo no le había hecho el menor caso. Aunque me preciaba –y lo sigo haciendo– de no tener reparos con los éxitos comerciales y mantener una mentalidad abierta en cuanto a los distintos géneros populares... no me había sentido interpelada por esa serie de literatura juvenil. Lo cual indica que siempre quedan prejuicios por vencer.

Ni siquiera cuando una buena amiga, que estaba implicada en el lanzamiento del cuarto volumen por su trabajo en la editorial Salamandra, me habló de las bondades de las novelas me di por aludida. No obstante, se me ocurrió que podía intentar obrar el milagro de conseguir que mi sobrino –de doce años– se interesara por la lectura aprovechando el tirón mediático de la serie. Compré *Harry Potter y la piedra filosofal*, se la llevé a mi sobrino, hizo caso omiso, en el trayecto de vuelta la leí... y en cuanto pisé Barcelona me lancé a buscar el segundo volumen con auténtica desesperación. En los quioscos de las Ramblas un domingo por la tarde, para más señas.

El resto, es historia: persuadí a varios amigos y colegas para que lo leyeran hasta enrolarlos en el club de fans declarados de *Harry Potter*, esperé ansiosamente el lanzamiento de los nuevos volúmenes y acudí entusiasmada a las librerías cada vez que se publicaba una nueva entrega. Si no lo hice ataviada con varita y cicatriz fue por sentido del decoro y no por falta de ganas. Por cierto, mi sobrino acabó rindiéndose también a *Harry Potter*, aunque algo más tarde.

No me cabe la menor duda de que esa reacción explosivamente apasionada que me generó la primera lectura de *Harry Potter* tuvo que ver con dos factores. En primer lugar, me conectó directamente con mis placenteras, desinteresadas y felices lecturas de la infancia y si digo la verdad, no con lecturas relacionadas con la magia y las criaturas fantásticas –aunque la consistencia y riqueza del universo mágico de *Harry Potter* es indudable– sino con novelas ambientadas en internados, que empezaban y acababan con el calendario escolar y en el que las amistades y rencillas entre alumnas ocupaban la trama. Estoy hablando, concretamente, de *Torres de Malory*, de Enid Blyton.

En segundo lugar, y estoy convencida de que esta es una sensación común a muchos lectores de la saga, me enganchó sin remisión. Y es que la maestría narrativa de J.K. Rowling, quien a mi juicio domina como pocos escritores el control y dosificación del relato, funciona desde la primera línea. Se puede tener una imaginación delirante y crear un universo de fantasía rico y exuberante pero si la narración no funciona en sus engranajes básicos –esto es, qué se cuenta y cómo se organiza esa información– todo se va al traste. *Harry Potter* funciona como una

maquinaria de relojería perfectamente engrasada y en consecuencia, arrastró a la lectora –una servidora– con una fuerza a la que no pudo resistirse. Más allá del primer volumen y considerando la saga en general, el dominio de Rowling de los ejes narrativos se hizo absolutamente evidente y el único adjetivo que se me ocurre para calificarlo es apabullante. Las distintas relecturas de los libros todavía me han convencido más de esta valoración.

Tras ese primer y luminoso contacto con la serie, seguí adelante para contemplar estupefacta cómo los tonos oscuros y, finalmente, una intensa penumbra iba envolviendo los capítulos y los libros, hasta el punto de que considero que la serie tiene mucho de gótico y más particularmente que *Harry Potter y la Orden del Fénix* es una novela gótica en toda regla, y de las buenas. La estupefacción ante este cambio de rumbo quizás no debería haber sido ser tanta: al fin y al cabo, la opresión y la angustia del gótico tiene mucho que ver con el descubrimiento de una realidad que no es fácil de comprender, clasificar, controlar y menos aún de juzgar moralmente. Podría poner muchos de ejemplos de la saga que van en esa dirección pero solo diré una palabra: Snape.

Como digo, el padecimiento del héroe o heroína gótica es en buena medida un tránsito interior, de carácter moral, lo cual encaja muy bien con el modelo clásico de aventura heroica entendida como un viaje iniciático en el que se alcanza la recompensa y el conocimiento (¿la recompensa del conocimiento?) a base de superar aventuras. Solo que en este caso, el camino es algo más espinoso y con más dobleces que en las tradicionales *quests*. Además, que esa combinación entre los modelos heroicos y los tonos góticos se fusione con la angustia adolescente que poco a poco se va apoderando de la novela me parece una genialidad.

Quizás el elemento menos aparente en mi primera lectura de la serie pero que ha marcado mis relecturas posteriores es la potente actualidad que atesora la saga más allá de un dominio increíble de un amplísimo repertorio literario que incluye géneros y modelos muy distintos. Un poco a caballo de todos ellos y manteniendo un cierto aire tradicional, me fascina que la serie insista temáticamente en aspectos tan posmodernos (aunque el gótico tendría aquí mucho que decir) como la concepción de la identidad y la realidad misma como relato, abundando en los dispositivos textuales y las referencias a la textualidad, que se van dispersando en toda la saga. Son los textos y los relatos de los otros el único asidero de Harry para saber quién es y qué está pasando, y precisamente por ser relatos son inestables y dependen de una interpretación. Y Harry aprenderá a las duras cómo la realidad es muy distinta según quién la cuente y sobre todos, cómo una mala interpretación de los relatos tiene consecuencias catastróficas. Recordemos el desgraciado final de Sirius Black y cómo se llega a ese punto.

El asunto daría para escribir muchos artículos científicos, puesto que esta vía interpretativa tiene que ver con mi condición de lectora especializada, de profesora universitaria, de investigadora en narrativas populares, de académica, en definitiva. Una académica eso sí, que cuando llega a extremos de agotamiento con la institución universitaria y sus exigencias –que no le van a la zaga a los despropósitos del

Ministerio de Magia en su peor momento— siempre acaba pensando en los gemelos Weasley montando un sindiós de dimensiones cósmicas en Hogwarts antes de largarse y dejar a Umbridge con un palmo de narices. Y esta reconfortante imagen vale más que cualquier artículo o consideración que pueda hacer sobre la saga.

Álvaro Delgado Ordás

When I was 6 years old, my mother took me to the annual street book market in my hometown. It had always seemed that I was going to be a great reader and so she let me take a look at the books on display in the different stands in order to choose one. There were tons of appealing books there but my attention was kept by a three-coloured pile: yellow, green and orange. I took a yellow one –it seemed flatter– and read the plot. Magic. Broomsticks. Wizards. Harry Potter. I wanted it. My mother was already beside me and she gave me a suspicious look while I showed her the book with imploring eyes. After a quick look she told me it was a little bit too soon for that ‘type’ of books. I reluctantly chose another one after she promised to give it to me as a present for my seventh birthday.

She kept her word. She gave me *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) as a birthday present in 2000. I really enjoyed it; the story was fantastic and incredible. According to the taste of my 7-year-old self, it was the best book I had ever read. Moreover, it was my first ‘big’ book. I was ‘bigger’ now and I was finally allowed to read ‘this kind’ of books. I quickly learned that the story of Harry continued and I got the second one. While I was reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), everybody at school seemed to get involved in the *Harry Potter* universe. We started pretending to be *Harry Potter’s* characters in our daily schoolyard games and those who were already going through *The Prisoner of Azkaban* gave themselves airs, looking important and superior.

I had to wait until my eighth birthday, 2001, to get *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999). I went to my grandparent’s village for a fortnight to celebrate both my birthday and All Saints’ Day (1st November) and by the time I was back on Monday the book was read. The story seemed to me much more exciting, intense and full of mystery. Maybe Halloween night’s atmosphere, the visits to the cemetery and the northern wind are to be blamed for this, also the cold, cloudy weather, but the third book remains still today as my favourite one out of the *Harry Potter* series. The idea of having a protective *patronus* became a recurring dream to me.

That same year, my mother took me along with a friend of hers and her two children to the first *Harry Potter* film launch at the biggest cinema in my hometown. This is a big old theatre called Emperador, built in the 1950s and adorned with a vintage look, now sadly abandoned and taken over by the local government with the ever-lasting promise of a future re-opening. That day, the two adjacent streets were

closed to cars due to the growing amount of people waiting outside the theatre to watch *Harry Potter*. I had never seen myself in the middle of such a crowd.

At the beginning of 2002, on the last days of the Spanish Christmas, the Three Wise Men brought me *The Goblet of Fire* (2000). The experience of reading it was far different from the previous books. The first chapter, consisting of Harry's dream about the Riddle manor and Voldemort killing the gardener was very frightening and almost disturbing. The other three *Harry Potter* volumes had provided me with good vibes and wonderful adventures but now the plot seemed to have radically changed. I left the book for some weeks and gave it another try later. This time I connected with the story and went through the whole book with increasing curiosity.

Many questions remained unsolved at the end of it and since there were not any more titles published yet I decided to start it again. By 2004, when *Order of the Phoenix* was published, I had read the whole series several times. I was ten then and high school was starting after the summer. I read *Order* during the last weeks of school, along with my best friend. We spent our free time making comments about the story, hating together the new disgusting characters and making fun of how our English teacher, who shared her name with Mrs. Umbridge, was similar to her in many other ways.

Two years passed by until the next *Harry Potter* book was published. During them, I spent my first years at high school –hard times– and I read many more fantasy books in what at first felt as a pastime while waiting for Harry's next adventure but then led me to other series I became a great fan of. Laura Gallego's trilogies *Memorias de Idhún* (2004, 2005, 2006) and *Las crónicas de la torre* (2000, 2003, 2006) or Christopher Paolini's *The Inheritance Cycle* (2002, 2005, 2008, 2011) are some examples. Later on, I –shamefully– also read the complete *Twilight* saga (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

The last two *Harry Potter* books were published in 2006 and 2008. I was thirteen and fifteen, respectively, and I did the same in both cases. I got my copy booked a week before at the book shop and I re-read the whole series before devouring the new one with excitement. I even did that for *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2008), when I left high school in the middle of the morning to go to the book shop and get my copy. I also started to book a seat for every new *Harry Potter* film's first pass in the cinema, a habit I kept until *The Deathly Hallows Part 2* (2011).

I didn't feel disappointed by any of the deaths of the characters or by how Rowling drowns the surviving ones' future in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2008). The only fictional event that made me angry was how lord Voldemort died. I felt it would have been fairer for Harry to kill him effectively with the Death Curse instead of making Voldemort's wand rebel against him. I wanted Harry to take his revenge. I found it to be somehow unnecessarily softened. However, I didn't get obsessed by it. I had grown up with Harry and, until a certain point, the books involved a sacred feeling which made it impossible to criticize them largely or rebel against a particular passage. Typical feelings for a fan, I suppose.

The *Harry Potter* series definitely had a great impact in my growing-up process and shaped my reader's taste during childhood and teenage days. I guess the series provided me with role models and warned me about situations, which are unthinkable in their magical reading, but quite common in their real-life translation. Furthermore, *Philosopher's Stone* is, without any doubt, the book I have read more times, about twelve and counting.

Saray Díaz Suárez

I first learned about the *Harry Potter* series, I have to admit it, through the films. The year the first movie came out, 2001, I asked my mom to take me to see it for my birthday; I had seen the trailer on TV and I was really excited. By that time, I was 8 and I didn't know that it was actually an adaptation of a book series and not just a film. The truth is that I didn't know about that until I was 12 and in my first year at secondary school.

Looking back, I think I should be ashamed and when I tell people about this, they look at me disbelievingly because they cannot understand how I didn't know. I had a rough time as a child because of family problems and I didn't start reading for fun until that first year at secondary school. I think it was because of this that I didn't catch up on the series sooner but even when I knew, I was such a fan of the films that I simply didn't care about the series' coming from books.

When I grew older and was already an avid reader I should have read the novels, and I wanted to, but I loved too much the films. I just thought that, as films adaptations and books tend to be different, I didn't want the books to alter at all what I had seen. I had grown up with the films and I didn't want to mess up with one of the happiest memories I had of when I was little.

Reading a book before watching its adaptation for the screen is pretty different from watching a film and reading the book it is based on. I finally decided to read the books when I was in my second year as a graduate student. Most of my friends in college, and by that I mean all of them, had already read all the books more than once and I think that pressured me a bit. Sometimes I would meet with one of my best friends in the afternoon at the cafeteria and she would tell me about some things that were in the books and not in the films and I would get a strong desire to read the books and find out about those things that the films didn't show, and that are important to the story.

I bought the first two books as a 'self' Christmas present and when I finished them, I quickly bought the following one. It took me a while to read them because of the language; they are children's books but, even so, although they were easy to read, it was also strange for me to read them in that kind of style.

I found out about Sara Martín's course around the time I was reading *Harry Potter the Prisoner of Azkaban* and I was so excited about it that I wanted to finish the whole series quickly so I could attend that course. During the summer of 2013, I bought the following two books but it actually took me longer than I expected to read them because *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was pretty dense. After finishing it, I read the three following books as quickly as I could and I loved every second of them.

Since I had seen the films previous to the reading of the story, I couldn't stop comparing the films with the books and, for me, it was difficult to come round to the idea that the books were the original source. From the description of the characters to some scenes that have been changed or deleted, I kept comparing and questioning why those things that, for me, seemed important weren't in the films.

One of the first things I missed in the films (and didn't understand why it wasn't included) was James Potter's backstory, told by Lupin and Sirius to Harry in *Harry Potter the Prisoner of Azkaban*. When I read it, I was really surprised that it had been omitted because this was important to the understanding of something as crucial as Harry's *patronus*. However, I could understand that a film can't have everything, as it would be too long.

Without any doubt, the character that has marked me the most was Neville Longbottom. At 8 years old, I was this chubby little girl that was incredibly shy and an outcast with just a few friends, so when I saw *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* I felt identified with him. When Neville, who I thought was just like me, showed courage (as he tried to stop his friends) I thought that I wanted to be like him because I wasn't courageous. I was surprised and excited at the same time to see that Neville's development just got better and better.

While I grew up, Neville also grew up and changed. When from the fifth film onwards he stopped being the boy that stayed on the side, and sometimes helped, to become a team player involved in action, I liked him more or just even better. I always knew he was capable of more than the first films gave him credit for and he finally showed it. With Neville, I learned that first impressions of what someone seems to be are not always a reflection of what a person is capable of, or really is.

As I read the books, I liked more some characters like Harry, who, I have to admit, got on my nerves in some occasions. Also, I hated others that I hadn't paid attention previously to, like Percy, who makes me want to hit him –repeatedly. However, there were some things that I didn't exactly like or would like to change in the films but I hadn't thought about them until I read the books and considered them.

One of those things was why wasn't Neville the one to end Bellatrix? It just didn't make sense to me that he, who has suffered a lot because of her and how she tortured his parents, wasn't the one to kill her. No, it was Molly. Well, yes, Neville is just a young man, 17 years old, but he was in his right to take revenge on her. I mean, I would have if it were me, as she practically ruined his life. I could understand why J.K.

Rowling had Molly and not Neville kill Bellatrix but I don't share the idea that killing her would have made Neville evil. Nor do I agree that it was a good opportunity for Molly to show she was more than a housewife and stay-at-home mother. I think there were plenty of Death Eaters in the battle Molly could have killed instead.

I have quite an experience in reading fantasy books, this is the genre I have enjoyed most for the longest time and, for me, the *Harry Potter* series is a great example. I haven't read Tolkien nor other classic fantasy books' authors, they are on my reading list; as it was commented on in class, Rowling has taken some characteristics of classics like Tolkien in her books. I think that one of the things that make *Harry Potter* so great is the development of all its characters and there are a lot!

As far as fantasy goes, Rowling's books offer a whole different world inside the existing real one and this adds realism to the plot. Some fantasy books present worlds created from scratch and this makes them unbelievable. I suppose this is what fantasy books should be like, but, when you add some reality elements, just as the *Harry Potter* books do, the fantasy elements stand out and make the story greater. This also makes people believe in them or in the possibility of their existence.

Hristo Donev

Long ago in a distant land, at the very end of Europe, one 10-year-old boy was given a book. A book that would later change his perception of reality.

It all began on the holiest day of all, Christmas Eve. On that night the boy, who many called Hristo, received a gift from his sister. But it was not like any other gift. It was not a toy to play with, nor was it a garment to wear. It was something far more interesting and powerful... it was a book. And not just any book. When the boy looked at the cover, he saw the big golden letters announcing *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, beneath them was this peculiar boy with glasses holding onto a beautiful flying bird. "This book has to be read" he thought. And the next day, after the food from the Christmas dinner had settled down in his tummy, he opened the book and started reading. That is how his experience in the astonishing world of magic began.

Furthermore, this was the first book he ever received as a gift, except those in his toddler years, but they don't count as his intelligence back then was just enough to understand what the fox and cow do say.

This was the beginning of Hristo's journey not only into the world of *Harry Potter*, but also into the magical world of reading. When he started to read the book he immediately liked the story in it. With no prejudice and no critical thinking he was just amazed by the world of witches and wizards, castles and magical forests. It almost seemed like reality. That is why he started to write down the spells he read in the book and try to perform them later on... sadly until now he hasn't succeeded yet.

From the ending of the first book he understood that the story doesn't end here, there is still a lot more to be explored in this new world. He started talking with his friends about it and started searching for the next book. Then in 2003 a friend of his gave him *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. At that time Hristo was only 11 years old but he started to enjoy reading a lot and this new book was giving him so many hopes and dreams that there is much more to this world than the eye can see. He wanted to talk about this with his friends but hardly anybody was interested in this particular magical world created by those interesting books. So every time he was reading he was in the world of invisibility cloaks, flying cars and unicorns, and when he was with his friends he was in the world of spacecrafts, secret missions and football.

While reading the books he started to like Hermione, Ron, Dumbledore and even Lupin (he was one of his favourite characters), but he started to dislike Harry Potter. Maybe Hristo got a little bit jealous of him. He didn't like him because this boy with the glasses was taking all the credit for everything. He was not smart, athletic, or brave. All the other characters in the books were helping him non-stop through the story, but they didn't get any recognition. It was always Harry who was in the spotlight, although he didn't always deserve it.

Hristo almost stopped reading the books because of his dislike of Harry, but then in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* he saw the name of his country: Bulgaria. At first he couldn't believe that this was true. His country was part of this world of magic as well, and it was mentioned in this book that people all around the world read. It was a moment of joy. He later saw that there is almost nothing said about the country and the names of the Bulgarian characters were old and some of them invented, but still it was his country.

Then, there was this character, Viktor Krum, he was said to be brave and strong, and he was Bulgarian. "Ah..." Hristo said, "finally someone else who is called courageous, apart from Harry". But it was not long until he understood that Viktor, the Bulgarian, was presented more like a mindless, careless Hun, who barely even talks, than a brave and crafty character. He got disappointed with this 'foreign' character.

Yet, the boy still kept his hopes that somewhere in the book, there would be more about his nation, something interesting, something magical. But soon his hopes sank like the big ship which the Bulgarians came on. This was another mystery for Hristo. Where did those 'foreign' magicians come from and where did they go? Why did they come on a ship, were they pirates? How come everybody just left as if nothing had happened? So many questions were raised in his young, but certainly not small head.

By the end of the book he was very fond of Mad-eye Moody and when he found out that it wasn't really him but Barty Crouch Jr. Hristo felt a little bit sad. Also since Harry Potter was the hero once again he decided to stop reading the books, because it was getting irritating that this boy was at the centre of it all.

A year passed and Hristo hadn't read a single page from the books about Harry Potter. But then the movies came to his forgotten, far away country. Movies made with a lot of special effects, suspense and action. So Hristo got interested in the story again. Not the story of the boy, but the story of this magical world and the evil lord that wanted to take it over.

Then when he was 15 years old, he got *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and in the next two years he read the remaining books. As he was studying literature and languages by then he started reading the book a little bit more critically and he found out that what happened at the end was actually expected. Of course the boy was the hero and everybody loved him, but there was something more interesting than that. The books themselves. They were written as if they were growing up with the characters. Hristo started reading at the age of 10 and every book was even more interesting than the previous one, so the books must have aged with the readers as well. That was actually fascinating.

After he saw all the movies, he thought that he should read all the books, but as he had started from the second book the first time, so he did the second time he re-read them. There was no urge to read the first book... maybe because it was written for children.

The second time around everything was different. Hristo saw the many gaps and mistakes in the books, he got even more irritated by this boy wonder Harry Potter. The story was as much English, as it was American. It was English because of the lack of dark-skinned characters and because every woman in the book is in some way related to and dependent on a man. It was American because there is this one hero, who saved them all. (Although he didn't do anything by himself).

And so Hristo came to this sunny place called Barcelona to study and broaden his horizons and here he found people to talk with about those strange books.

"Maybe some of them have succeeded in performing a spell" he thought, writing his article for his university teacher under the soft red blanket.

And at the back of his head was this schizophrenic voice narrating his life...

Tania Duarte Montávez

As a kid, I was fascinated by magic. In a way, I still am. That is why it was no surprise to anyone that when the TV show *Charmed* (1998) premiered, I became obsessed with it. I turned into a 6-year-old little girl who wanted to become a witch and fight evil. Noticing my obsession with all things magic, my father suggested going to the cinema to watch a film that had just come out about a young wizard called Harry Potter. I refused. I actually remember saying I was not going to go watch a movie

about a little boy doing magic tricks with a wooden stick (I would later on learn, to my regret, that saying this made me sound a lot like a Dursley). My father insisted, though, so I gave in. Little did I know that the wizard with the wooden stick was about to change part of my life.

My father was right and to this day I still give him credit for my love for *Harry Potter*. As he predicted, I loved the film. Everybody knew I did, because I would not stop talking about it. That is why about a month later, for my eighth birthday, my aunt gave me my first *Harry Potter* book. Since she is only a few years older than I that was the first present she ever gave me, and it could not have been any more meaningful: it was my first real book.

I learned to read –properly read– at a really young age, earlier than any of my classmates, so I'd soon got bored with all the books that were considered 'appropriate' for my age at our local library. Just thinking about reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* felt like a huge challenge for me at the time and not many people thought I'd be able to finish the book. A week later, though, I got grounded: my parents found out I had been staying up late every night reading. I had finished the book but I couldn't get enough, so I would start it all over again every few days. Even though they were happy that I had fallen in love with a book, they decided it would be best for me if I was only allowed to read ten pages before bed, a rule which I obviously disobeyed from the very first day. After all, 'breaking the rules' is not such a terrible crime, is it now, Harry and friends?

I was so engrossed in that little world that I did not even bother buying the second book for a long time. In fact, I would buy the following books right after the movies came out. In hindsight, it does sound like a stupid thing to do, but back then it just felt right to wait and look forward to both the film and the novel at the same time. That does not mean I ever stopped being interested in *Harry Potter* between one book and the next one –quite the opposite, actually.

My two best friends in elementary school were also huge fans of the saga, so we would spend hours and hours talking about what we thought would happen to everyone in the series and pretending to cast spells on each other using tree branches. Even after I left town to go to high school and we went our separate ways, we would still get together every now and then and we would always end up discussing the books or the latest movie. We were two girls and a boy and I think all three of us felt quite special to be a part of our very own Golden Trio.

The *Harry Potter* books meant so much to me that now, twelve years later, I still remember where I was while reading certain scenes or how they made me feel at the time. I know that I was out with my parents on a Saturday while reading about Harry's first visit to Gringotts, that I found hilarious the fact that Harry had turned his teacher's hair blue back in school and how his scenes with Hermione made me wish they were together from the very beginning. I can even picture in my mind all the scenes –the ones that were not in the movies– the way I pictured them when I first

read them, like Snape's potions test right before Harry has his encounter with Quirrell at the end of *Philosopher's Stone*.

Not only certain scenes really had an impact on me, but also the characters. As a child, I had what I guess could be considered a huge crush on 'pre-teen' Harry, which eventually vanished; now, I am just very fond of him as a character. Something which has not vanished over time, though, is my love for Hermione. Personality-wise, I was just like her. I was bookish, bossy and, at times, a bit of a know-it-all, so she was a character I could relate to. She was the first character I ever admired (apart from Piper Halliwell from *Charmed* –funnily enough, another powerful witch). Actually, I liked Hermione so much that in elementary school I dressed up as her, and while it is true that looking at those pictures now makes me cringe, I understand why I did it. I wanted to be her. I looked up to her. And to this day, I still do.

As for the fear factor, I was always the kind of child that was easily scared by everything, from the dark to horror movies or horror stories. I could not stand any of it. But curiously enough, I was never afraid of anything regarding *Harry Potter*. It is often argued that there is nothing really scary about the saga before the moment Voldemort comes to life at the end of the fourth book, and by that point kids who started reading the books at a young age would be older and less impressionable. However, I disagree. What about Quirrell, who had the creepy face of the most evil wizard in the world embedded at the back of his head? What about the basilisk? Those are things that would have easily scared me as a child had I seen them or read about them in any other environment, but my theory has always been that you trust these 'good' characters so much that you cannot possibly be scared of anything. Harry is presented as a character that does not have a mean bone in his body, so you just root for him and his friends because you trust them to defeat evil. At least I did.

I don't think anything else has had, or will have, the effect that *Harry Potter* had on me. I remember that when I was reading *The Prisoner of Azkaban* back in 2004, my uncle said to me something that really upset me at the time, "You're wasting your time. You don't really think you will be interested in *Harry Potter* in a few years, do you? By the time the last movie comes out you will be around 18. You will have long forgotten about it". But I think that is exactly the reason why I feel so attached to the saga. I grew up with it. I became a young adult at the same time as Harry did and the text evolved along with us. I guess that is also the reason why it took me so long to read the last book. It had been sitting on my shelf since the moment it came out, but I just could not come around to reading it. I did not have it in me; I could not see *Harry Potter* end. Eventually I did, and I finally learned that Harry was not going anywhere: he would always be part of my life.

After *Harry Potter*, I have not read any of the author's books for adults as they do not really appeal to me and I admit I have not read many fantasy books, either. I did read the *Molly Moon* saga as a child, which I loved (another girl with supernatural abilities!), but apart from that I don't think I read any fantasy until *Twilight*, which I came across when I was about 14. It might have something to do with the fact that all the novels about wizards that I tried reading after *Harry Potter* reminded me of

Rowling's work, so I guess I sort of gave up and moved onto other genres I also enjoyed. Recently, though, I have been trying to get back into fantasy, but I am yet to find the right book that will really capture my attention and make me want to read more of it.

Jaime García

If someone had asked me what I thought of *Harry Potter* five or six years ago, the answer would have been different from what I would answer now. I have read the saga twice. As a kid, I enjoyed those colourful-covered books as only children and teenagers can do. Now, I do like them, but I see them for what they are: as non-perfect pieces, with a subjacent layer of meaning. I am deeply influenced by my college courses; and, somehow I feel that this more complex perspective is richer and deeper as well as sadder; for I do know that I will never feel that chapter-finishing ecstasy again.

Being a reader who can flick through pages of text without paying any attention whatsoever, it is only normal that my memory of what actually happens in *Harry Potter* is poor. Nonetheless, mark: WHAT HAPPENS is what I forgot, not what it is about; that is very clear to me; and it tends not to coincide with what many scholars assure.

Before writing this text, I glanced at various articles and essays with which I could find many marginal points in common, but at heart, I disagreed. For me, *Harry Potter* is nothing capable of being summarized, nothing 'literary'. *Harry Potter* is, and by rights it ought to be, the afternoons in the park with my friends playing different characters, reading in the back of my mum's car while she went on shopping... It is also the waiting, the desire to know more, to read a further page.

Although I played with my friends enthusiastically I never really expected to receive my acceptance letter; I always knew how to dislocate reality. However, I played on, I read on, I tried to use *Harry Potter* to have something in common with the friends I was so distant from. In 'Harry under the stairs' I saw myself, in the camaraderie of Slytherin I saw the others. As I grew, Harry grew. His problems evolved as mine where supposed to do, as ours as a generation did. Yet, in some way, I grew distant, his love affairs were something I used to skip while reading, his bravery and loyalty far from what I had ever experienced. As I broke away from him, I embraced the serenity and charm of Albus and Minerva.

Professor Minerva McGonagall has always been my favourite character: being able to both remain strict and be tender at moments, she was someone I looked up to. In addition, her 'apparently' chaste life-style was more in tune with my age and mind. Even now, that I know many more things about her, having read her backstory in Pottermore, I cannot feel but sympathy AND empathy. She was the one I liked the most, but if I were to choose the one I enjoyed the most, it would be Albus.

Dumbledore was, at least in the first books, a bigger beacon of reason and ethics than all New England had ever been. He was the one that would appear and solve everything or, at least, seem to solve it. His speech, full of maturity and reason, was by far the most interesting, his ambiguous sentences... and, very important, his humanization.

I did not cry when he died, he simply had to, even though I never got around to specify why. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that he became too prominent, too important, too round: we know his official role, but also his most personal life, his interest in the Muggle world... Maybe the reason why I never questioned his death was because, in obscure times, a person that for me was essentially good had very little opportunity to survive. Maybe that is why I always thought Hagrid had to die.

I mentioned above that I utterly disliked Harry's love affairs, Ron and Hermione's too. I am gay. This may seem out of place here, but for a boy coming to terms with his own sexuality in a town where heteronormativity seems a must and homonormativity is... (well, let's say it implies concepts far beyond scorn) having gay characters to identify with and not necessarily to look up to is essential; and for me, Dumbledore was never gay. He might be in J.K.R.'s mind, but not in the books, not so explicitly at least. He was, I would say, "queer" in the most essential and general sense of the word. He was different, but asexual for me.

As you have already seen, I grew distant from the books to the extent that although I read them all I never got to watch the last two films. The Magic World became too different to be a escape, too illusory to be a mind's wandering: while Harry and me were both bullied and set apart, we shared an intense bond; when he became the sort of hero I never got to be, he was a little reminder of my own failure. Not that I ever hated him, only that I could say I changed from a first person narrator to an editorial one, from reading and thinking, I began only to read. I enjoyed and still enjoy to this day the complex network of historical-social-cultural data impregnating the saga, but now I analyse them more cautiously.

I have *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in my bathroom. Piled between a *Crash Course into Architecture*, a couple of issues of some architectural magazine my parents are subscribers to and the toilet paper rolls. I do admit it is not the style of bathroom reading one might expect (by the way, I always thought that we should coin a new genre: 'bathroom literature' for those books that are so appropriate for those moments of intimacy and relax) and yet it has proven to be one of the books which stands for more time in the pile. This last book is my favourite in the saga, possibly due to its more adult style. I find some moments of certain poetic quality or, at least, dramatic feeling: Harry becomes Sir Gawain riding towards death when entering the Dark Forest, Snape's secret being revealed, etc. These are, for me, key scenes in the saga, stitches to the many open wounds Rowling scraped for six books.

"I hate the epilogue". So do I, dear Potterheads. I really despise it, but I comprehend it. I now think J.K. was writing for herself and she needed an epilogue to

make sure every character would be as happy as she was (or to avoid them being as miserable as she herself had also been). The epilogue disrupts the mimesis, the diegetic. Whereas *Harry Potter* is an account of a teenager set on different quests, which is the opposite to what most teenagers do, the epilogue hints that those teenagers are mature adults living mature adults lives (may I point, heterosexual standard lives?), which is what most adults do. Furthermore, if the books were aimed to a public that had been growing with the characters... what's the use of an epilogue that compresses, bounds and configures a particular ending rather than allowing each reader to grow and invent, freely, the lives of the characters they were so fond of before? That is why I think that many parts of *Harry Potter* are by and for J.K., which is not essentially 'evil', but just forces criticism to adapt itself.

My second reading of the saga has just begun. I have little time to re-read the seven books and little courage to revisit the days of my childhood, fearing I might 'deconstruct' what I thought was pure and sheer reading pleasure. I fear to discover the weaknesses of Hogwarts: the status of house-elves, the alienation and animalization of Hagrid... yet there is a point I would like to revisit now, with more knowledge, with a more observant eye: how wizards play with their wands (the joke sounded more appropriate in my mind, though).

A proper study of the status of sexuality or even of sex-representations in *Harry Potter* (come on, so many guys in the same building and all are so pure?) would be a challenge I would love to undertake, although I know I lack of time and theory (yet!). There is still room for hope, though. Some of those who read the saga in their "younger and more vulnerable years" are now contesting, answering back, positing alternatives to the standards: Darry (a blending between Harry and Draco) is now a major 'shipping' (i.e. a major fan-fomented love/sexual relation between two fictional characters), enhancement of the rich cultural background of the saga also occurs (some fanfics even introduce Sir Gawain or Merlin within their plots), etc. There is, therefore, hope: hope in fan fiction.

Finally, I would like to say that I still recommend *Harry Potter* to my cousins. After all, is it really more harmful than video-games, text books or TV (if harmful at all)?

Laia García Jordà

The *Harry Potter* saga had an important impact on me as a reader. I was 9 when I first made contact with the phenomenon, hearing about it on the TV news and seeing it around me in school kids who had weird lines drawn on their foreheads. I had a neighbour, a year younger than me, who had already read the first book and could not stop calling out spells in the car when we were on our way to school. This was a little annoying because I didn't know what she was saying or what all that fuss was about. Later I got to know a little bit about this Harry Potter and a certain Wizarding world.

The day came when my mother got home from a trip to Barcelona bringing me a copy of the first book, *Harry Potter i la Pedra Filosofal* (2001) in Catalan. She had already read it in English and she thought it would be a good book for me to get me started on reading. The observation I made when I first had it in my hands was the following: the book was rather thick and had loads of pages. Yes, I was a horrible reader, I hated to read, it was tedious, tiresome and a waste of time. I was 10 by that time and, as expected, my mom made a few tries. For a couple of weeks, after eating lunch, she made me stay with her and read the book out loud for the two of us. I still remember sitting on that chair with my legs crossed over, reading those handfuls of words very well arranged in long infinite lines which gave me nothing but a headache. I think the farthest I got were 20 pages, not more. Soon I found a way to fool my mother and escape from that strange book with too many pages to my taste.

A few years later I got to see the first movie of the saga, which was released in cinemas, to my surprise, on my birthday. I loved the film, it had everything I liked: the characters were my age approximately, they were on an adventure in a magical world and they could fly using broomsticks. Pure fantasy mixed with the excitement of the new, the uncommon and the dangerous. I have to admit that, although I was pretty sure of it being a film, at times I questioned reality. In fact, I wanted to question it, I wanted to have that little flint of hope that maybe I'd get a letter from Hogwarts or that my mother and father would finally reveal to me their Wizarding identity.

After the release day I was anxious to see the movie again and luckily my parents bought the DVD later, which became Fridays' movie for a long, long time (until they released the second one!). As time went by, I saw the second and the third movie, which were even better and made my interest for the story grow stronger. Then, the turning point in my life as an inexperienced reader came when after having seen the third film I was too curious to wait for the fourth one, which was due in a year or two. Therefore, at 13 I was forced by my need to know what would happen to Harry to steal my mother's book from her bedside table and start reading it in my room. My mother's reaction was of surprise, first to see me reading such a thick book all by myself; second, the book was in English and it was no adaptation, and she was well aware of its complexity and the effort I must have been doing in reading it.

Then it happened, it finally clicked!! For the first time I was literally submerged in an amazing world. I had stopped seeing long multiple lines of tiny black words on big white pages. It was then that I started to see the images in my mind as if they were a film being displayed before my eyes. Suddenly the pages disappeared by magic, they were no longer in front of me. Even *I* disappeared from my bedroom, leaving space only for those images and *that* voice telling me what was happening in the story. I had disappeared from my world and appeared into another one, a process I can compare to the one of falling asleep and starting to dream, though this dream would last longer and be remembered afterwards.

The feeling that reading the book gave me is the best experience I've ever had in reading. After being aware of this magic there was no stop: I needed more. I finished

the fourth book and since I had to wait for the fifth one to come out I decided to read the first, the second and the third meanwhile. My questions during that time were “How is it that I have not known about this magic reading process until now and how come I hated the book when I first got it?” Well, I think I was not ready for it yet.

I guess there is no need to explain what happened with the rest of the books, I read them all as they were being published. The last important moment in my reading of *Harry Potter* came when I got the last and seventh book of the saga. While I was holding the key to this story, the lives of the characters in my hands, I could not help feeling sad because this was the last one, the end to my enjoyment and adventure. My main worry before and after reading the book was whether I would ever find other books such as these, that would not let me want to stop and would bury me into another world barely noticing it, magically. The answer until now is no: I’ve read other books, sagas and genres and they have hooked me but not in the same way as *Harry Potter* did and without the same effects.

Cristina González Varo

When I was younger, around 6 or 7 years old, I had some trouble with my social skills. Friends and teachers from school would tell my parents things like “Oh, she’s so talkative and outspoken!” or “she’s really friendly, Cristina makes sure to let her friends know that she is really there for them, no matter what”. The funny thing is I did not relate to those words, to the image others had of me. This started as a development issue, I guess: people expected me to be nice and friendly and I, on the other hand, worried about letting down those around me, since I had no idea what it was that they wanted/expected from me. Although this situation might not seem relevant to the *Harry Potter* series and my reading experience, I would say it was, in fact, the main reason why I felt I had to continue reading, in order to develop the imaginary but helpful bond that I had created between Harry and I.

I must say that I learnt about *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) quite late. My parents were eager readers once, but sadly not by the time I got into the family. They had quitted their habit due to pointless excuses, such as being busy at work, tiredness and even having me –which has been a heavy burden I have been carrying ever since. If I remember correctly, I started hearing stories about this boy who played with magic, and those who were telling the story were my classmates, but not the bookworms or outcasts but the ‘cool’ ones. I was so shocked! I had no idea they were able to pick up a book and read *just* for the fun of it. That made me curious and eager to learn more about this little boy with a funny name, Harry Potter. I was about 9 or 10 at that time, and for Christmas I asked my parents for the first book about Harry Potter. They were always really supportive when it came to my reading interests and my father kindly approved of it as a hobby, which at some points irritated me –it was not only a hobby to me, not like dancing or going to the movies. Reading (*Harry Potter* particularly) became a way of communication, a need and a passion.

The whole idea of a parallel universe, a *magical* world, changed me completely. One of the details that impressed me most was Hogwarts and how Harry got there. The train station, with the unbelievable yet plausible Platform 9 ¾, was just the best imaginary getaway I could ever have imagined. And what made it unbelievably amazing was just how common it was. If you want to go somewhere, you might take the train in your daily, normal, boring life. But doing so even when you are a wizard/witch? Genius! J.K. Rowling surely got me there, making simple and *accessible* what seemed so far away and impossible at first sight.

On a personal level, I felt connected with Harry the minute he showed his confusion when it came to his fame. I strongly believe Harry is a character very easy to relate to, since most kids experience doubts when they are growing up, especially when it comes to social classes and belonging to a group. When he realized how important he was to some people, the legend, the story behind his life, the truth about his parents' death... It all clicked. It was as if someone –J.K. Rowling herself– had taken a quick look at my life, (or should I say at my thoughts on my life?) and decided to take them to a whole new level, a new world full of magic and possibilities. There, a kid with no idea of life is expected to achieve great things, feeling the constant pressure around him/her and being unable to say 'no' to those who ask for the legend or the myth. Of course it is a bit dramatic, comparing my life to Harry's, but it is just how it felt back in those days.

As I read into the lines of the first book, Ron Weasley emerged and for the first time I was hopeful. I knew immediately he would be there for Harry, unconditionally. I must confess that at some points I felt jealous. Jealous of the bond that Harry, Ron and Hermione shared, for I had never experienced such a good, loyal, true, special (you name it) friendship.

The years passed and I was part of the story, I felt as if I could proudly say I belonged to a group. It would be somehow awkward if I had felt like that just because of reading the *Harry Potter* series and it was not just that. The experience of learning about this new world allowed me to share my excitement with other kids at school, to actually feel confident enough to discuss my opinion on a subject that was a common territory for my new, unexpected friends and me.

It is now, looking back at the whole process, that I realize I have grown up alongside J.K. Rowling's words and imagination. I was also shocked by how *easy* it had been to connect with the books, all due to the author's skills to adapt the narrative style seven different times. It just felt normal when I read the first book at the age of 10/11, and the same for the other ones as I grew up. I had no trouble adapting my mind to Harry's mind, since both his and mine were developing somehow at the same pace.

I consider my reading of the series as my first addiction, even though I was not aware of it at the time. It felt like a need, I had to know how the story developed, how Harry would fight Lord Voldemort next time... As embarrassing as it may be, I also

identified myself with Hermione, and I enjoyed very much seeing her blossom, becoming a woman and leaving behind part of her bossy-self, learning how to be more mature while at the same time dealing with her inner self-consciousness, often attached to growing up and what it is expected from you. As sexist as it may seem in today's world, it just made me feel normal, for I was struggling with such dilemmas at the same time.

I guess J.K. Rowling's work had an effect on me which was quite invisible to my younger self. I had never read fantasy literature before, and although I did not become a great fan of the genre, it made me curious and I developed a taste for the whole Marvel universe.

I must add that thanks to the *Harry Potter* series and the effect it had on me, I became a much more creative girl and my dad surely approved of my 'hobby' in a greater way. I know he was just the proudest dad when I asked for his old Marvel comics, so in a way, *Harry Potter* also reinforced the link my dad and I share, which means the world to me.

Silvia González Riopedre

Harry Potter: My Unexpected Journey

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good".

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

There is only one word, one concept, that comes to the mind of the collective unconscious whenever the *Harry Potter* series is mentioned: magic. What a powerful word. Readers from all over the world just cannot get enough of it. Why would they? With magic, every single aspect of your life can become true: you may discover that you are a wizard (or a witch!) and start a whole new adventure from that moment onwards. Isn't that our most deepest desire? Most children that have read the series will tell you, with no doubt, that, of course, you must be mad if you do not take the chance to go to the finest (and coolest, I have to admit) school of Witchcraft and Wizardry ever. However, *Harry Potter's* appeal is not only strong for children, but for adults, too. Rowling always has a lesson for us all to learn; it does not matter whether we are "insufferable know-it-alls" (as Severus Snape would put it) or whether our stubbornness does not let us see beyond the boundaries of the mind. *Harry Potter* is, above all, the people's tale.

I discovered the magic world of *Harry Potter* when I was 9 years old. As I was carefully studying the pages of a monthly book magazine, I came across a book with a particularly curious cover: a child with rather untidy black hair, a lightning-bolt shaped scar on his forehead and round eyeglasses, who could not be more than two years older than me, was sitting on a broomstick. That was it. Twelve years later, I cannot

remember vividly what was it, but something clicked in my head (magic?) and that something made me run to my parents to tell them I wanted that book as a birthday present. Probably, it was the best choice I have ever made.

Bewildered and bewitched by this extravagant book that narrated how a sorting hat could choose which house of Hogwarts you should go into, how a group of friends could confront “a sea of troubles” with great success, as Hamlet would put it; and how the power of good and evil certainly is a warm gun, I found myself utterly obsessed with these unusual books. As time went by, I grew eager to know how the story would continue, and my expectations were far outstripped.

Chamber of Secrets and *Prisoner of Azkaban* were finally published in Spain when I was 12 and 14 years old, respectively. As I started reading them, I realized I was the same age as Harry Potter himself. I believe my excitement and happiness exceeded all boundaries. In children's literature, when the reader is empathizing with one of the main characters, especially the protagonist, the book has achieved its aim by giving a precious, tiny treat to the reader. That is another beauty of *Harry Potter*: if a book series has well-developed, marked, self-conscious characters for the reader to choose to relate to, that is *Harry Potter*. To a great extent, this is one of the series' strong points.

Nevertheless, good things come to those who wait, and before I could realize it, *The Goblet of Fire*, *The Order of the Phoenix* and *The Half-Blood Prince* were published; that is, my favourite books of the whole series. These books got me on the verge of my adolescence, and so, they became quintessential on a daily basis for me. By going through the pages of *The Goblet of Fire*, one conceives the idea that Harry, in spite of being just 14-years-old, is no longer a child; the same thought comes to the mind of the reader when perusing the very beginning of the two following books: in *Goblet of Fire*, Harry is still cheerful, somehow, due to his expectations of living someday with his godfather, Sirius Black; yet the outset of *Order of The Phoenix* sees a radical evolution in the protagonist's character. Harry has seen his arch-enemy, Voldemort, returned in a most evil way. He has confronted death face to face for the first time by hopelessly watching how his friend Cedric Diggory dies at the hands of Voldemort's loyal servant, Wormtail. Finally, but not less importantly, at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince*, a 16-year-old Harry is devastated by the weight of love and death: his godfather has died without even saying goodbye; full of angst about his death and bearing his parents' loving memory in his mind, Harry gets into a most unexpected journey with his mentor, Dumbledore, from which he returns a different person.

Of course, we are not living in the thrilling magical world of Harry, we are not fighting dragons and mermaids in the Triwizard Championship, nor do we go into a dangerous adventure looking for horcruxes; yet, this is a tale from which there are always several moral lessons to extract: “If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals” (*The Goblet of Fire*); “Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike” (*The Order of The Phoenix*); or “Let us step into the night and pursue that flighty temptress, adventure” (*The Half-Blood Prince*). Indeed, much more defining and inspiring quotes

can be taken from the books, but I have chosen these ones just to prove that J.K. Rowling is a master (mistress?) in subliminally telling her readers moral ideas about life –we must not forget that her target audience are mostly children, adolescents and young adults, that is, people who are discovering the essence of life and need some guidance to step into the world.

And yet, as with all wars, life goes on. Lastly, *Deathly Hallows* fell into my hands. By that time, Harry, Ron and Hermione had become quintessential in the final days of my adolescence. I no longer could see these three best friends as children who always got in trouble and succeeded in their adventures; but as adults who were prepared to do anything, who were ready to fight, and who no longer undertook adventures on their own; now they were assigned tasks as responsible adults.

All in all, *Harry Potter* has proved to be the most influential book in my life; it helped me to go through my darkest times during my childhood and adolescence. Nonetheless, now, as a young adult, I find myself at times scanning and even re-reading chapters and chapters of the book to allay my darkest fears and thoughts. In short, *Harry Potter* has become a complete and utter literary classic not only for me, but for a whole new generation of readers.

“Mischief managed”

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*

Dídac Gurguí

Of House-elves and Children’s Tales, of Love, Loyalty and Innocence

It all started back in 1998 or 1999, when I was 8 years old. Now it seems a really long time ago, and it is. Fifteen/sixteen years ago is more than half my age. Back then, I had never opened a book that had not been assigned to me in school, and I never enjoyed those books, which I was made to read. The word “fun” never crossed my mind when I thought about reading. I enjoyed stories, though, I really did. I loved watching them in movies, I loved creating them even more for my drawings or role-playing with my best friend. But I had never had a book in my hands that told a story that I liked enough. Not that there weren’t any out there, of course there were! But my primary school teachers didn’t seem to be interested in them, and my parents have never really been readers and never tried to make me become one.

But one day my grandmother, an avid reader, was recommended to check out a new fantasy series that had just come out and was doing really well. Intrigued, she bought for herself *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, and loved it. Once she had devoured the first three books, she decided that it was about time that I started to read. One weekend when I was visiting her, she made me sit next to her, put *Philosopher’s Stone* on her lap, and started reading aloud. I don’t remember much of

my first introduction to *Harry Potter* other than when we got to the bit on the very first page when Petunia is described as having “twice as much the usual amount of neck”, which was very useful to spy on her neighbours. I suddenly found myself laughing so hard and so loud that I instantly fell in love with the book. When my grandmother finished reading me the first chapter, I continued by myself, and my love only grew stronger.

What the next years had in store for me was not the best. My parents got divorced, for about a year and a half I was friendless at school, my grandfather was sent away to a nursing home, my father and my grandmother left my hometown and moved to Barcelona (which is a 25-minute train ride from home, but back then it seemed so far away), my grades went down. Apparently I displayed symptoms of what later on was described to me as depression. My grandma once told me that, even though I had always been a very shy kid, I was very chatty and bubbly around her. “And one day you just fell silent”.

But the strange thing is, I don’t really remember being an unhappy child. Almost all I remember is *Harry Potter*. Reading *Harry Potter*, reimagining the books, drawing my favourite characters and settings, playing *Harry Potter* with my friends (when we weren’t playing as our own made-up characters, I used to pretend I was Hermione. I didn’t care she was a girl! Why would I? She was the smartest, she knew all the spells, she kept getting the other two out of trouble), making wands out of chopsticks, dressing up in the black robes and cloaks my grandma had made for me.

Then, I believe shortly after I finished *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the first movie was announced. I started collecting pictures of the cast as they were revealed, and articles that my grandma would cut for me from magazines and newspapers. My room was suddenly completely covered in pictures and posters; pinned, blue-tacked, cello-taped, even stapled everywhere except the ceiling, where I had stuck a glow-in-the-dark waning moon and dozens of little stars so that when I went to sleep I could look up and see the night sky as if I were in the Great Hall.

The movie release was getting closer and closer, and one day a friend told me that he had gone to see *Doctor Doolittle 2*, and they had played the trailer for *Philosopher’s Stone* before the film started. I went to see *Doctor Doolittle 2* that very afternoon. Do I remember anything at all about *Doctor Doolittle*? Nope. I don’t think I remembered anything about *Doctor Doolittle* when I got home that evening. All that was in my mind was “Hedwig’s Theme”, three-headed Fluffy, Hermione waving her wand, the ostrich feather flying above the students’ heads, the moving staircases.

It was not just love. I see that now. It was an escapist obsession. It was me trying to get away from what would have made me an unhappy child. That became more evident as I grew older. In their teenage years everybody seemed to have stepped out from their fantasy worlds and into the real world (as real as the world of teenagers is). I didn’t. If anything, I retreated even deeper into my own world, which had been widened to accommodate more than *Harry Potter*, though my beloved saga was the centre of it.

It's curious, however, that my literary interests widened not necessarily towards the direction of fantasy, which I do enjoy (and sometimes write), but is not my favourite genre. I've never cared much for *Lord of The Rings*, for instance, and can't say that many other high fantasy or urban fantasy or science fiction titles fill my bookshelves. Perhaps that's why it didn't bother me that much to hear that Rowling was now more interested in other fiction genres. I've read *The Casual Vacancy* and I'm reading *The Cuckoo's Calling*, and I don't really wish they were fantasy novels (I do wish they were *Harry Potter*-related novels, but that's a whole other matter).

Going back to Harry and my adolescence, as I was in process of becoming a very Gothy, very moody teenager, the fifth book came out, and the change in tone suited me perfectly. Harry's anger and frustration and sadness were mine. I became obsessed with Dementors and thestrals and Severus Snape. When my depression was kicking in, I enjoyed the darker bits, the gloomiest characters, from the books and the films. When I was feeling happier, or wanted to feel happier, I had the rest. That's one thing that is great about the saga: it's not always cheerful, it's not always dark. There's the right amount of everything, one can always, always relate. That's why it stayed with me.

I grew up, my depression dwindled. For a couple of years, perhaps, *Harry Potter* was not the centre of my world. Until I thought I was growing up too fast, everything was happening too fast and I wasn't prepared. Very dramatically, I wrote on the last page of the seventh book (which I read in English not because I trusted my abilities but rather because I needed to know), when I finished it: "and with it, my childhood". Yes, I know... Very melodramatic. But hey: that's me, and that's *Harry Potter* for me.

When the last two movies came out, my interest seemed to blow out of proportion again, and has been like that since then. Perhaps it's still a way of escapism. I don't know. I'm not sure I like to think of it as that. It's more like... a celebration of what has made me so happy, of what once helped me so much when I "just fell silent", or as I struggled with low self-esteem and self-harm.

I owe Harry, I owe Rowling a lot. And even though I'm not a child anymore, even though I'm 22 and about to finish my degree, *Harry Potter* still makes me happy. I still love to re-read the books, and I take something new from them every time. I still love to go through *Harry Potter* movie marathons, and talk with those friends who share this passion about every little detail, sharing our thoughts, our theories that go beyond, far beyond what's written. And I still tear up when I listen to "Leaving Hogwarts", from the first movie, or when I see or read about Harry meeting his departed loved ones again, in the forest, as he gathers strength to go to die. This saga has reached into me farther than any other. It speaks to me –to us all! – at so many different levels. For me it is a reminder that "happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light".

LUMOS!

Marta Guzmán Prieto

That was the day. It was November 2001, an ordinary day. My dad picked me up from school like every afternoon. He told me that he had a surprise for me, we were going to the cinema! I was only 10 years old, not at all aware of the current movie listings. Little did I know about who Harry Potter was until I saw the movie. That was the day when another child got to know his name.

I just remember that I left the cinema amazed that there could be a world like that one, a world full of magic. I definitely wanted a wand and a broomstick too, not to speak of studying in a boarding school full of talking portraits. I had been so delighted to get in touch with that different world that I just wanted to know more and more about it all.

The wait did not last long: the next day, after coming back home from school, I found a little present on my bed. I opened it anxiously and there it was, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). I have to thank my parents, then, for getting me into this amazing world of fantasy and magic.

It just took me three days to read this first book and to hook me even more. I even remember my parents at night scolding me to go to bed because it was late. I guess they were so happy to see me reading so excitedly that the following week I already had in my hands the second book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998).

My best friend Cristina Sánchez and I spent most of the time discussing and imagining what our years at Hogwarts would be like. I must admit that I came to feel identified with Harry and hoped wholeheartedly that the letter reached my door the day I turned 11 (unfortunately, it never came and I'm still waiting for it because as we all know, hope is the last thing to lose).

I must confess that many classmates and I played wand duels and Quidditch games at playtime. I always wanted to play Hermione because since I started reading the books I wanted to be like her in my real world. A brave, loyal, smart girl sometimes even a little bit annoying but at the same time true to her personality.

I finished reading *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) in December 2001. I was so obsessed with the saga that even most of the essays that language teachers asked me to write were about Harry Potter.

I will never understand what brought J.K. Rowling to make Harry fall in love with Cho Chang. Whatever the reason, I didn't like her from the very first time she was introduced by the author. By the fourth book it is clear that she only thinks of herself.

Indeed, from my point of view she uses Harry in order to forget Cedric and then, she gets rid of him to soon start dating other guys.

I went to the cinema to watch all the movies with my family, and my mom and I started to shed tears watching how Cedric Diggory was killed by Peter Pettigrew. (I didn't cry while reading the fourth book *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) but, seeing Robert Pattinson so young, dying, was a hard blow).

Moreover, I was so stuck by the topic that I even bought Bertie Bott's Flavour Beans every time I could. I insisted that my parents buy me a wand and every year for Carnival I wanted a robe to dress just like another Hogwarts student, though my dream really never came true.

I was 12 when *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) was released. I couldn't believe that Sirius had been killed by Bellatrix Lestrange, his own cousin. The author didn't give him time to be happy (for God's sake!), he only lived trouble after trouble. I didn't understand why J.K. Rowling insisted on leaving Harry alone with no family, not even his godfather. Harry couldn't be more miserable.

I do not agree with J.K. Rowling for choosing a boy as the protagonist, I'll always say that Hermione is the best character and she should have been the protagonist. Nonetheless, I guess that Rowling did it on purpose in order to capture the attention of male readers; otherwise, the series would have been just books for girls.

As time passed I was getting older but anyway, I couldn't wait for the sixth book *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) to come out. I was 13 and I remember that evening, the day of the release in Plaça Catalunya's FNAC. There were many people, young and not so young, sharing the same eagerness as if they were 4-years-old kids waiting to be given a piece of candy.

I was reading the sixth book of the saga and at the same time I watched *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* in the cinema. Whenever there was a new movie coming out I feared that the director was not faithful to the book but, I'll admit that I was pleased with them all.

At the age of 15 I had already read the entire saga. Every time I turned the last page of each book a kind of sadness and melancholy came over me, thinking about when it would be the moment to start reading a new adventure. Nevertheless, when I turned the last page of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) it was different. I remember it well (I also remember the epilogue, it couldn't be worse...). It was August and, I was on the beach in Mallorca reading while the sunlight bathed my skin. Last page came and a strange feeling embraced me. There would not be more adventures, no more spells or magic anymore. What was worse, they had grown up, so had I.

I would describe the *Harry Potter* saga as part of my childhood. The books have been part of my life for a long period of time, taking into account that while I was waiting for the release of the next books I read them all about four or five more times

each. This created a strong link between me and the saga. Harry and I were the same age through the series. Hence, I remember *Harry Potter* with love and it is now part of my past. I can say that I had a happy childhood believing and dreaming about being a witch someday.

It must be this feeling what makes me read all the books again and again every year. It makes me feel good, realizing or pretending that these adventures didn't end. I just need to turn the first page of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) to see that I can start dreaming all over again. I dare say that this feeling of still being in my childhood will never disappear or at least I hope it won't.

When my sister turned 11 I thought it would be a good idea to introduce her to the *Harry Potter* saga but, she declined my offer. She had already watched the eight movies but, come on, I've watched them too and I'm still reading the books. So, she is now 14 and I offered her the books again. Once again, she said 'no'. It makes me sad because if she does not read the books she will never understand nor know the enormity of that magic world.

On the other hand, only two weeks before starting the second semester of my fourth and last course at university, a classmate told me that there was a subject based on the *Harry Potter* series. I couldn't believe it! It was like a dream come true, a subject that I could really enjoy. I got in contact with the teacher, Sara Martín, and, without knowing me, she didn't doubt to give me the opportunity to join the class.

Hence, now I'm reading the books one more time but, this time paying attention to elements that J.K. Rowling uses, such as xenophobia in the Triwizard tournament, racism in the 'mudblood' insult, school values, braveness and cowardice, the true love of a mother and the power of the Ministry of Magic.

I always wanted to know more about Hogwarts and now I have the opportunity by writing the essay on teachers and subjects in Hogwarts. I don't know whether I'll write my B.A. thesis on the *Harry Potter* series. I don't know, it is always nice to learn more about that magic world. I guess you never know.

Joshua Harper

Sitting on the couch late on a school night, my father in his chair. In my back yard underneath our tree fort on a warm summer day, my father and brother with me. Curled up on a couch in the basement next to the fire as the snow falls outside. A warm spring night near the end of the school year, the entire family on the couch. Alone, in our new house in the basement one summer morning. Late on a summer night in my room, my mother sitting in the rocking chair I was rocked in as a baby. On my back deck, looking out at the mountains as a cool summer breeze rustles the trees.

I can tell you exactly where and when I finished each *Harry Potter* book and how I felt at the time.

I was only 4 years old when *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the title I grew up with, was published and it wasn't until two years later that my parents introduced me to the series. From a very young age narratives and stories fascinated me but *Harry Potter* was the first book to really grab me and run with my imagination. I vividly remember beginning the first book one night while on vacation in Hawaii with my parents. We were in the hotel room after a long day of swimming and playing on the beach and I was exhausted but my father insisted I stay up and read one chapter of a new book he had purchased for me. From that first chapter I knew I had discovered something special.

My Dad read the first four books to me and he was unrelenting when it came to pacing our way, often holding us to one or two chapters a night. He even made us take a few months break in between *Chamber of Secrets* and *Prisoner of Azkaban* to read another novel: *Where the Red Fern Grows*. After the first four books I had caught up to the release dates of each new entry and began reading the series on my own. Even as I got older and *Harry Potter* became something that wasn't necessarily cool to like I still loved it and I remember everything pertaining to the series during those years, from the release of the first movie to my excitement the day before I got the final book.

When I finished the last chapter of the final book it wasn't simply the end of a story it was the end of a journey that I had been on for years. Sitting on my deck I had a sense of finality, there were no more questions, no more mysteries, no more stories to be told. It was a very mixed set of emotions but I felt the gravity of the experience more pointedly than from finishing any other narrative.

Growing up with *Harry Potter* was the most important part in my experience with the novels. It would have been entirely different had I read them all in the span of a year or if I had been older when I began reading. Although I was younger than Harry's character my age let me feel as if I was part of the story, like I could accomplish the same things given the opportunity. Perhaps the greatest advantage in growing up with the *Harry Potter* series was the fact that I got to mature alongside the books. Rowling wrote the series almost as if it was a child itself growing and maturing, but also becoming darker and more serious with each entry. Where the 14-year-old version of me may have thought the first few books childish, the 7-year-old me would have been terrified of anything past *Goblet of Fire*. In this way I count myself lucky that I was able to experience the series as it was intended and grow with it. It was also important that I started the series at a young age because it introduced me to a love of reading and fantasy that I still have today.

Without *Harry Potter* I may have never read other fantasy series such as *Eragon* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It instilled in me a sense of hope, the idea that there is some great adventure out there waiting for all of us and that we can all be heroes if we step up and accept the challenge. I don't mean adventure in the same mystical sense, although part of me still believes my acceptance letter to Hogwarts was lost in the

mail, but in the world we inhabit where you sometimes must make your own adventure. *Harry Potter* stirred in me a love for adventure that with the help of other narratives such as *Indiana Jones* transformed into a passion for travel, which is a big part of why I'm studying in Spain today.

In regards to that all-important question, should Harry have killed Voldemort?, I argue he should have. Maybe this has changed as I've grown older or maybe it's the influence of the darker, grittier, more realistic narratives I've chosen, such as *The Road*, *The Last of Us*, *Game of Thrones*, etc. Despite this, I believe that Harry killing Voldemort is a very human thing to do that keeps the character relatable. If Harry has to be this ultimate beacon of good it takes the reader out of the experience to an extent, making Harry's position unattainable. Furthermore Harry killing Voldemort represents a bigger sacrifice on his part as it forces him to give up a part of himself and do something he thought he never would. There are plenty of choices made in the novels that I might argue against or change if it was up to me but eventually the story would become something entirely different.

We love *Harry Potter* as it is and changing it would make it something else entirely making the question of what should have happened irrelevant. *Harry Potter* is a remarkable narrative that has had a tremendous influence on my life and it is nothing short of a dream come true to be taking a semester-long class on the series.

Álvaro Juárez López

Before I start telling my experience of reading (and re-reading) the *Harry Potter* saga I must admit that it has been challenging for me to take a retrospective look and bring back some odd memories from my past. What I am going to explain in the following lines is not fiction. However, I found very relevant to explain some pieces of my own life in order to understand my feelings towards the books.

My mother died when I was 5 years old. Unfortunately, I just keep two blurry memories of her and some photographs that help me to remember how she looked like. We lived in a small suburb or residential area called Can Ros and my father worked at that time as a police officer in Barcelona. Two years after my mother's death, my father started a relationship with a woman 20 years younger than him. Some weeks after their wedding, my sister and I were sent to live with our new step-grandparents, in a small town in Tarragona. The reason we were given for this change was that my stepmother was pregnant and had some health problems which did not allow her to drive me and my sister everyday to school from the remote place where we lived.

For five years I lived there, with my first Dursleys. I don't know the reason why they wanted to make our lives miserable but they behaved very similarly to the Dursleys; I would dare to say that we did not live in the cupboard under the stairs

because there wasn't one in the house. Even though I had not started reading the books yet, these events would make me feel identified with Potter in the future. My father had two daughters with his new wife and they lived happily in the house where my mother died, very far away from us. I saw them once a month on Sundays when my father came to visit his parents-in-law with his new family.

Suddenly my father decided to bring us, his children, back to our house in Can Ros, but this idea did not suit my stepmother and they got divorced. The next three or four months happened very fast. I was back with my sister in our house, my father worked everyday in Barcelona and he started receiving false complaints from his ex-wife, who was very angry with him because he had decided to make his two other children come back home. He had to attend several trials, I had to testify in one of them and I did not understand the situation at all. In the middle of this fast spiral of events my father explained that we were going to spend a weekend in our maternal great-uncles' house. He did not come back.

So, there was I, living with the second Dursleys. They were not as bad as the first ones. Nonetheless, they were angry because they did not expect to be forced to take care of two children at their age (they were around 65 years old. I was about 12, my sister is four years older than me). They enrolled me in a public high school in a neighbourhood very close to La Mina, you can imagine that there were many Slytherins living there. Nevertheless, I always avoided bad influences. One of my best friends was, and still is, Lucía, who happened to be the daughter of the high school headmaster. At that time she was considered to be a little freak, since she enjoyed reading and she always got the top marks of the class.

Every summer, I used to spend holidays with my great uncle and aunt in a small town in Cuenca. I had fun there, although sometimes I complained that it was boring. One day my great-aunt bought me *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. It was a recommendation of the bookseller from the small news-stand of the town, who apparently did not know that there was a first part of the book. I was very surprised because my great uncle and aunt hardly ever bought me anything. I used to wear the old clothes of a nephew's neighbour in Barcelona, and at Christmas and for birthdays I always received socks –apart from an occasion when I was given an English dictionary which I needed for school. I really enjoyed that *Harry Potter* book, I read it three times that summer.

Back in Barcelona I asked for *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, I asked for it so many times that I was accused of being tiresome. I watched the movies and I rapidly became a fan of the saga. I had the same age as Harry as the books were being published and I felt highly identified with him. So, I tried to be up to date with news and everything related with the Wizarding world. I discussed the books with my friend Lucía and we used to joke about me being Potter and she being Hermione. Lucía's father, the high school headmaster, asked me to help him, doing some library tasks in the afternoons and some weekends. Of course, he knew that I was not very comfortable in my house and tried to 'save' me from wasting my time doing nothing. I am very grateful for that because, still today, I do not know where my education

comes from. I suppose that I took the best of all the people who taught me things I believed to be necessary for life. Carlos Díaz (that's the headmaster's name) became a father-figure for me, as Dumbledore is to Harry.

I escaped from the second Dursleys when I was 16 years old and I started being the busy student, part-time teacher and waiter that I am still today. Even so, I had time to go to all the premieres of *Harry Potter* movies. I could not wait for the translated versions of the last books either, so I read them in English. At that time, I guess that my innocence was coming to an end and I started to be more critical about the saga. As a fan, I demanded more quality and I got very angry with some decisions J.K. Rowling made. For example, I became very annoyed when Rowling decided to kill Sirius. However, sometimes I agreed with some tough decisions about the storyline which Rowling made, as she argued she was portraying the devastation of war in her books. I imagine that I was so dazzled by the potential of the story that I did not want it to be spoiled. I remember discussing the plot with Lucía for hours. How come Harry ended up with Ginny? And Ron with Hermione? Why are we left with a blank about Harry Potter's profession when it was so important to him in the last books? Sometimes we angrily shouted, sometimes we laughed at it. "It's like a joke the author plays on the readers", we used to say.

At the end of the saga I was a bit disappointed. Nevertheless, I think I will always keep great memories about me reading, enjoying and discussing the books. Potter has been my adventure's mate during my adolescence. The series made me increase my passion for reading as well as improve my critical skills. I recommend it and I will keep on recommending it to all students who ask me for a book to read during summer.

Marvin Kolovitsch

"Marvin, look I have got a little present for you! I was at the bookshop today and one of the booksellers just recommended me that one. She said that it has been recently translated into German and that the stories about this boy are already quite famous in the United Kingdom. I hope that you will like it!"

I perfectly remember the words of my mother when she gave me my first book of the *Harry Potter* series. At this point of time, the year is 2003, I was not interested in reading anything except books about adolescents, dealing with their first experiences regarding life, school, music, drugs and love. Therefore, when I saw the rather 'childish' design of the German version of the book about a boy who goes to a school full of wizards, I decided to delay the reading of *Harry Potter* for an indeterminate duration. Besides, my mother had unknowingly bought me the second book of the series and it would not make any sense at all to start with the second book, would it?

Several months later, I was packing my suitcase as my family and I got ready to travel to Turkey on vacation. I was already 15 years old and most of my friends did not have to go on vacation with their parents any more. Instead, they were allowed to stay at home, enjoying their juvenile freedom which was only interrupted by their grandmothers' daily visit, bringing lunch and supper as well as doing some cleaning-up. However, my parents were not as 'open-minded' and 'laissez-faire' as the parents of most of my friends, therefore, I was instructed to accompany them for fourteen boring and never-ending days in a tourist-club somewhere in Turkey, where most of the other children were about 12 years old and, therefore, definitely too young. I knew that I needed to be well prepared in order to survive the stay. On the next day, I went to our local bookshop in order to get several books as I knew that I'd have a lot time for reading. There was nothing else to distract me and, among all those books, there was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

After the ninth day, several juvenile novels and countless hours of playing Game-Boy, I decided to give *Harry Potter* a try. After another two days, I finished the book and decided that it was, well, actually not to my taste. I somehow was not into that kind of fantasy, with all its wizards and goblins and trolls and crying mandrakes. However, as I had finished all the other books and as there were still two more days left, I started the book which my mother had bought me: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. And with that one, I got hooked on J.K. Rowling's series.

Before school started, I read the third book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, which is still my most favourite one. I was not only proud of myself because of reading such a huge tome, I was also looking forward to knowing how the series would continue. Unfortunately, the German translation of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was not available at this point of time, but I was so curious to know how the story would continue! Therefore, I did not even doubt a second whether I was able to finish a book with so many pages in a different language without a feeling of discouragement. I pleaded my mum to lend me her credit card in order to buy the English version of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and still nowadays I can remember her, grinning all over her face as she felt a rush of excitement because of being the person who called my attention and passion for the *Harry Potter* series.

A few days later, I received a package which included the longingly expected *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. I remember delaying all other duties, as I just wanted to read the book. However, when I approached its end, I just read a few pages per day in order to extend the reading and the time with my fictive friends and their adventures. I knew that the following months, maybe even a year, until the publishing of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, would be a harsh time of waiting before meeting them all again.

In the meantime, I watched the movies, but it just was not the same and I got quite confused about the difference between the images presented in the movies and the ones in my head. Therefore, I stopped watching them and re-read the series' other

books in English, as I was profoundly proud about the achievement of having read such a huge volume in a different language.

However, after such a long time without them, I started to forget my fictive friends, had other experiences, read other books and, in the end, did not pay much attention to the fact that *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* was already published as well as the series' last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. I suppose that I was just too concerned with life's other duties, as school, work, friends or, maybe I was just angry and disappointed because J.K. Rowling had let me wait that long. I finished school, accomplished my work with the Red Cross (the alternative service to the obligatory military service which all male adolescents have to fulfil in Austria) and did not have any clue what to do with my life –whether to go to university, start to work or to take a gap year.

A few months later, I was strolling around the airport of Vienna, waiting for the boarding of my plane to Málaga. I had recently signed a work contract for an internship at the reception desk of a Spanish language school for foreigners in Tarifa and was looking forward to this new adventure. However, I had some mixed feelings about this trip, as I was quite young –19 years old– and had just said goodbye for an unknown span of time to my grandparents and my mother who, at this point of time, was going through divorce from my father after twenty years of marriage. Eventually, I passed by a newspaper store at the airport. I remembered that I wanted to buy some magazines for the flight and entered the store, looking for the magazines without paying attention to my surroundings when I nearly crashed into a huge stack of *Harry Potter* books. You can't imagine how glad I was to meet them again at this moment of my life! I forgot about the magazines but instead, I purchased the last two books of the series.

Now, when looking back, I don't really know whether it was a coincidence that I forgot my fictive friends for a few years, stopping to read the series, or whether it was supposed to happen in this way. When being that young, going to a foreign country where you don't know anyone because of an internship at a school, you are quite happy to 'meet' and to read about familiar persons and to accompany them and their adventures after an exhausting day at work.

Nevertheless, due to our seminar, my perception and the approach to the *Harry Potter* series has changed radically and, for the first time, I have read the texts from a critical and academic point of view, focusing on the inclusion of ideologies, and socio-political as well as cultural conventions and constructions. From my perspective, it is deeply interesting to see how the texts reflect and reconstruct these aspects. Furthermore, I believe that it is crucial to include such contemporary and influential texts into the research of academic disciplines. Definitely, the study of texts written by Shakespeare or, for example, a writer of the Victorian Era are also of great importance, nevertheless, the study of contemporary (popular, mass) literature appears to be of a certain marginalized focus in comparison to the great classic compositions of the past. I don't know whether this is the consequence of the little academic recognition such topics receive, however, I do feel a personal lack of knowledge in this area and I am

aspiring to deepening my knowledge in the area of contemporary, cultural, popular, mass literature over the time of our course.

Finally, I would like to conclude this essay with a personal statement about our course, namely, that it somehow indicates a paradigm shift regarding my academic career: up to now I have always had the impression that there exists, in a certain way, an academic (sometimes hegemonic) authority, evaluating, leading and criticising the students' choice of topics and, thereby, excluding the personal interests when one wanted to analyze texts as, for example, the *Harry Potter* series. This does not seem to be valid anymore, and I am proud of experiencing that a student is able to combine accurate and recognized academic work with personal interests, contributing to academic development from a completely new position regarding motivation. Therefore, I am looking forward to the different contributions, topics, analyses and research from my classmates in the course 'English Cultural Studies: The *Harry Potter* Case'.

Lara López Lueje

My first encounter with the Wizarding world was through the movies. I was 7 years old when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* came out, and I loved it. My friends and I pretended we were wizards at school and I was certain I would some day marry Daniel Radcliffe. The next year, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* was released, and my brother and I spent the whole summer playing Draco and Harry's duel. We loved to do the part in which Draco falls and bounces.

That same year my mother decided to buy the first book to give it a try herself. That is something I will always thank her for. She was never fond of reading, and, as I had imagined, she soon dropped it. But I was curious, so I got the book from her room and started reading it. Nowadays, when I think of that moment, chills still go down my spine. It is not only the thrill of the book, but also the importance of that moment in my life. From that instant on, I became part of a global movement that would mark both my childhood and adolescence.

Once I finished the first book, I begged my parents to get me the second, and the third, and the fourth. Then, I had to wait, which was something totally new for me: it was the first time in my life that I felt the urging need to know more, but "more" didn't exist (yet). Of course, I was not the only one who thought that way. All my closest friends were in the same situation as I, and our bonds became stronger thanks to this long wait. Instead of playing soccer with everybody else, we would spend breaks talking about our favourite characters and scenes.

When the next book came out, we were so eager to read it that we all finished it in less than a week. I remember my mother telling me off and asking me to please leave the book aside for at least one hour. She didn't understand I couldn't: I had to

finish it before somebody came and spoiled the ending for me. It was the same with the sixth and seventh books. I really did regret it with the last one, though. Because of my impatience, the fun ended too soon.

By the time the book saga ended, there were still three movies left. It was not the same, but at least we had something to look forward to. We were not prepared to let it go. However, *Harry Potter's* impact on me was stronger than on the rest of my group. As I saw it, the fact that there were more things to come gave me the right to think of myself as a child and not as a teenager, although I was 16 years old and would be finishing high school by the next year.

I guess I was afraid of change. There were many things I didn't understand about the "teen-girl society": how getting boys to like you was more important than anything else, how you had to give up what you had always loved in favour of the image of a grown-up that all teenagers want to convey. It was in this moment that I immersed myself in fan fiction. I read stories written by people with the same mentality as me, which made me feel less lonely and kept the books –and my dreams – alive at the same time. I discovered that I was not the only human being that hated Ginny and wanted Draco and Harry to end up together. I met tons of people who admired Neville and thought of him as the best character in the series. Thanks to the Internet, I discovered a whole, beautiful, new world out of the nutshell that my town was.

So, when the last movie was released, I was the only one of my friends who still took it seriously. They did cry when Snape died, but I hid and cried once the film was over. I couldn't imagine my existence without the excitement of waiting for the next "*Harry Potter* thing" to come. What was I supposed to do? Fan fiction and fan art would be helpful for some time, but I knew I would eventually have to move on, and the thought terrified me. I did not know how to do it.

Luckily for me, the *Harry Potter* experience never really ended –now that I think of it, it was obvious it wouldn't end: it is too profitable to do so. One of the most important moments of my life was my visit to 'The Wizarding World of *Harry Potter*' at Universal Studios, in Orlando. I walked the streets of Hogsmeade and had lunch at The Three Broomsticks. I visited Ollivander's and Honeydukes, where I got a chocolate frog (which, when I opened it, slipped from my hand giving the impression of being alive). I also drank butterbeer, and in the toilets I heard Mourning Myrtle cry. Being there, surrounded by people who were as excited as I was, made me feel at home. My younger siblings never understood why that place made me so happy, but my parents did in some way. They had watched me grow up with *Harry Potter* and, those days, they could see the 8-year-old girl that I once was.

Now, three years later, most have forgotten and the rest are not as fanatical as they were in the beginning. But that does not change the fact that the *Harry Potter* saga has marked our generation in many ways. Contrary to what the media wants to make us believe, the ones who enjoy reading are not the "oddballs" anymore. I have a friend who has never read the books nor watched the movies, and when she says so,

people can't help but look at her in astonishment. We, Potterheads or not, cannot conceive the idea of someone our age being out of this movement because it was –and still is– a very important part of our lives.

“After all this time?–
‘Always’, said Snape”.

Laura Luque Brugue

My cousins gave me *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as a present when I turned 11. It was 2003 and the books (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) had been around for four years since their publication in the Catalan language back in 1999. My cousins had not read the book, yet in a trip they made to London they heard about all the fuss surrounding the series and decided to give it to me as a birthday present. Still today, I can't thank them enough for being the ones who introduced me to the Wizarding world: I consider my copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* my personal train ticket to Hogwarts.

I remember not starting to read it until a few days (maybe weeks) later. It took me a while to lay my hands on the book and get sucked into it. Yet, once I started reading the book I couldn't put it down. The *Harry Potter* series has this kind of magic: it makes you want to turn the pages and makes you eager to know more.

I recall being an avid reader as a child. However, it is hard for me to picture the books that filled my childhood besides *Harry Potter*, as the series became my only book obsession for a while. I remember having read some of Enid Blyton's novels: *The Breakfast Club* and *Saint Clare's*; they were hand-me-downs from my mother, who used to read them as a young girl. I can also recall reading Roald Dahl and *The Knickerbocker Gang* (*La penya dels tigres* in Catalan), by Thomas Brezina. Apart from that, I would consider *Harry Potter* the main series of my childhood, pulling me away from spending hours in front of the television and devoting them to reading.

When I finished the first book, I ‘think’ (because I can't remember too well) that I asked my mother to buy me the second one as soon as possible. However, it also took me some time to actually start reading the book. I don't know why but *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* did not pull me in as much as *Philosopher's Stone*. Still today, it is my least favourite book of the series. Nevertheless, I finished it and I liked it, and I didn't have a problem starting the rest of the books: as soon as I got them I started reading.

I recall one summer when I eagerly waited for my mother to come home with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. I was 13 or 14 at the time and I was thrilled because my age actually matched the age of Harry, Ron and Hermione (or I thought, because later on I found out that Hermione is actually one year older than Harry and

Ron). Spending my time reading meant spending time with the trio, whom I considered friends. I remember spending my nights reading for hours because I couldn't just put the book down and the next day behaving like a zombie at school. However, it was all worth it since the reading of *Harry Potter* also made me closer to Roger, now my best friend. We would consider ourselves as the Catalan Harry and Hermione. Ron was always missing, though.

If I'm not wrong, I read *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* when I was 14 and it was the first time that I cried with the books, due to Cedric's death at the end. And then came Sirius. Oh dear, Sirius's death was something I wasn't expecting. The re-reading of the book only make it worse, I couldn't stop thinking how unfair his death was. Poor Sirius. I had to put the book down and calm myself a little before I could actually keep on reading. I had actual tears running down my face, I was sobbing uncontrollably. It wasn't just that once: it happened again with Dumbledore in *Half-Blood Prince* and in *Deathly Hallows*. It was early in the morning (three or four...) when I found out that Snape had 'murdered' Dumbledore and my mother actually came to my room to see if I was all right.

Nevertheless, *Deathly Hallows* was the one book that made me miserable. I recall that it was well into the night when I read about Hedwig's death. If that wasn't enough, a few pages later Moody died, too. I was devastated. All the deaths in *Deathly Hallows* had a great emotional impact on me; Dobby's and Fred's were the most horrifying ones. I hated both Bellatrix and J.K. Rowling for taking two of my favourite characters away from me. At that moment, the only highlight for me was finally that Ron and Hermione were together. However, now that I am 21 I don't feel they should have ended together. Growing a little makes you put things into perspective.

The one thing I can't get over, still today, is why Harry (or Rowling) felt the need to name his kids Albus Severus, James Sirius and Lily Luna. I doubt Ginny had a saying on this, and it really irks me. The whole epilogue is a too cheesy way of saying goodbye.

I read the series again from November to January, for the Cultural Studies subject I'm taking this year. It had been a while since I last read the books, almost four years. I must say, the experience has been quite different. When I first read the series I didn't pay too much attention to the issues that are being described in the book or the gaps that Rowling left.

I want to think that after four years studying literature I am capable to understand what I wasn't able to understand when I first read the saga. I never questioned why the protagonist was a boy and not a girl when I started reading the series. Now I do, as I question so many other aspects of the books. Yet, it doesn't make me love the books less. On the contrary, I quite enjoy analyzing and questioning Rowling's decisions.

Harry Potter has brought really good moments to my life and really good experiences. When I was 12 I went in a surprise trip to London. I remember asking to

go to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, I just wouldn't leave without having been there. At 17, when I had to turn in my 'project' (my 'Treball de Recerca') I decided to do research on *Harry Potter*. Thanks to that, I could meet the Catalan translator for the first four books, Laura Escorihuela. It was amazing to sit with her over coffee and ask her about her experience translating *Harry Potter*.

After reading *Harry Potter* I continued reading fantasy fiction and I proudly say that it's one of my favourite genres. About the same time I was reading *Harry Potter* I also read the trilogy of *The Lives of the Mayfair Witches*, by Anne Rice and *The Inheritance Cycle*, by Christopher Paolini. Currently, I'm still waiting for G. R. R. Martin to finish the *Song of Ice and Fire* saga and for the end of Patrick Rothfuss's *The Kingkiller Chronicles*, both are Heroic/Medieval Fantasy.

Montserrat Martín

I started reading the first book in the *Harry Potter* series at the age of 11 thanks to my brother. He read it because it was quite popular in his class. At the beginning, I thought I would not like it, since my brother is three years younger than I and I thought the series would be too childish for me. However, I was very surprised that I could not stop reading the first book until I finished it. It was the best choice I could make since J.K. Rowling's creation brought me into a new world, a magic world. Everything was so interesting and special and powerful that I could not prevent myself from falling in love with the series. I must also acknowledge that I was jealous of the students at Hogwarts for having such an incredible and wonderful school, being able to learn magic and how to fly on a broom; actually, I was desperate to learn how to play Quidditch.

My favourite character since the first page was Harry. I felt quite similar to him because I got average marks in my studies, one of my best friends was the smartest girl in the school... Nevertheless, after reading all the books, I think that my favourite character is Sirius Black. I love the way he is portrayed in the books, always mysterious, loyal to his friends and conscious of why he is fighting against Voldemort. In addition, I must say I also love the Weasley twins, I think their attitude towards life is the best way of living, always looking for the good and funny side of every bad thing.

At the age of 17, I read the books again. Since I had grown up and my perspective and personal interest were more mature, I read the books from another point of view and I realized that I could enjoy better the whole series. One of the factors that I appreciate is the evolution of the characters and how the plot evolves in more and more profound and complex ways. I also would like to point out that the way that the Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore's Army work is a clear example of how organized people can achieve their objectives and why it is not necessary to have hierarchies (even though, in the book the way they are actually organized is not that well explained).

One of the things that shocked me most deeply after reading the books in English is how the Catalan version (which is the one that I read when I was little) is actually very good in the sense that even though most of the names are translated, the translators maintained the spirit of the English words by not just making literal translations. I could not stop laughing when I realized that the 'Pi Cabaralla' was the 'Whomping Willow' and that 'Marc Roure' was in fact 'Oliver Wood'.

I am not really sure about which is my favourite book in the whole series, but I think I cannot choose between *Order of the Phoenix* and *Half-Blood Prince*. In both books you can finally start to get to know the real complexity of the magical world, the characters... and the dark side.

Sara Martín Alegre

I first learned about *Harry Potter* from the British and the Spanish media, and from an undergrad student who worked for Salamandra, the lucky Spanish publishing house of the books (so many had rejected the first one in the series...). Meritxell told me that *Philosopher's Stone* was worth reading and also worth the high reputation it was beginning to have, above all among young readers. I trusted her.

In April 2000 I read the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), and, according to my reading diary, I didn't like it much –I only awarded it two stars out of four. I remember feeling put off by the conservative public school setting, the absurd rivalries among the houses and the very traditional, conventional storytelling. So, I let it be. I was 33 then, by the way, maybe not the best age to read that first book.

My good friend and university colleague, Bela Clúa, insisted –I'm not sure when– that I gave Rowling another chance, this time reading the series as mainly a gothic story and not just as children's fiction. I trusted her in this, as she knows plenty about gothic, a shared passion.

In the summer of 2004 I read the first five books, including the last one published by then, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003). I remember reading non-stop by the pool of the Pyrenees hotel I was staying at. If I recall correctly I read the four first books in two weeks, though this seems quite unlikely and possibly I read there only the first three, then *Goblet* and *Phoenix* once back home.

Whatever the chronology may have been I distinctly recall e-mailing Bela to thank her and to announce that I had fallen in love with Sirius, would kill myself if anything bad happened to him, etc... She kindly replied that we'd talk later... once I finished *Phoenix*.

So, I was 38, a mature, experienced reader of more than a couple thousands of books, reading Rowling's novels with the double stance particular to Literature teachers (with the critical eye always open) when I found myself reduced to tears after reading how Sirius is killed by Bellatrix Lestrange. When I got over this sentimental episode, more or less, I asked myself what kind of mechanism had the author used to make me be a 12-year-old girl again, and whether this was accidental (my own psyche was responsible) or wisely calculated. The doubt remains.

I read *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* as soon as it was published, in July 2005, then *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in July 2007, also as soon as I could lay my hands on it. According to my diary, I then read the whole series between October and November 2008. I went through the same exact misery when I got to Sirius's death and wondered why, as this time I knew it was coming. I saw the corresponding film adaptation soon after its release, and then the whole film series again in December 2012. Four times Sirius has died on me, the four times I have gone through the same emotional rollercoaster, a bit lessened only with the second viewing of *Order*.

I wrote then a post, on 31st December 2012, in my blog *The Joys of Teaching Literature*, explaining that I had just seen the films and much preferred the novels. One day, I mused, I would teach the elective on *Harry Potter* that I had always wanted to teach. I was really thinking of doing so in 2014-15, as I was already committed to teaching something else in 2013-14.

To my surprise a student, Alicia Vázquez (see her own testimonial [here](#)), sent in a comment –although this was in the middle of the Christmas holidays (now I know that she, a shy girl, had a hard time convincing herself that e-mailing me was fine). 'Are you in earnest?', she asked me. 'Yes', I replied. 'Can you find me 20 prospective students?', I added, fearing I would not have the required minimum of 10. Two days later a post-grad student emailed me: 'So, what's going on with you and *Harry Potter*? The students' Facebook is all abuzz'. And here I am, fifteen months later, teaching the elective to more than 40 very enthusiastic students... and enjoying every minute of it.

In preparation for the course, I read the whole series once again between October and November 2013. This was a particularly intense reading, as I read pencil in hand, already marking passages and ideas for each of the lectures I was going to give. I had previously made a list of issues and ran it by the first half dozen students who contacted me. They seemed to think it was fine and this list remains, essentially, the basis of the elective subject, though now I wonder why I paid less attention to curses, hexes, charms and spells than they deserve...

I don't have children but I have four nieces who enjoy reading (not my nephew, sadly, he's into videogames). Last year, I offered the eldest girl to buy her the first *Harry Potter* book for her eight birthday and read one volume every year with her –not just because I wanted to test her reactions, that would be cold-blooded of me, but because I wanted to share that pleasure with her. She adamantly declined my offer, for strongly prejudiced reasons unclear even to herself. I must say that the last time I

read the whole saga I was glad of her rejection, as I found the text truly depressing, an appalling tale of abuse, with horrors many adults who buy the books would never imagine. Now, in the middle of teaching the course and reading my students' own essays on the experience of reading *Harry Potter*, I've told myself I'll wait for a couple more years and give my niece *Philosopher's Stone* when she is eleven.

What I have enjoyed best in my different readings is Rowling's ability to make her text grow with Harry. The contrast between the childish tone of the earliest two volumes and the teenage angst of the last two is amazing, possibly the main literary achievement of the saga. I also respect Rowling for keeping track of a very complex plot (despite a few gaps) and of so many different characters whom she does manage to make quite distinctive for her reader. I like Rowling very much for the trick she pulls with Snape and, well, because she made me feel like a naïve, brand-new reader for a while.

I don't like her at all for choosing a boy, and not Hermione, as the protagonist – she's clearly writing for boys, and I don't like that at all. She's also extremely conservative and very English in the worst sense of the word: see the food the kids eat, the xenophobia in the Triwizard tournament, the racism that only enables her to introduce a few token non-white characters, her support of public school values... I actually think the text is more solid as a text than she is a writer, which is odd to say, I know. I find myself split, since I admire her work more than I admire her, if I admire her at all.

As regards Sirius, I find her treatment of the character a major flaw: you don't place a character in the terrible circumstances of his long Azkaban imprisonment only to kill him off because of a squabble with a house-elf. She mismanages the process of mourning of her readers and forgets to give Sirius a funeral (even Dobby gets one, for God's sake). What is even perhaps more important, she neglects to include an official apology from the Ministry of Magic to Sirius, for his unfair imprisonment, and a public reinstatement.

In a way, then, I have chosen to teach the elective on *Harry Potter* on the hope of getting Rowling and Sirius out of my system. I would like to say goodbye to the text, write an essay on adult emotional overreactions to literature (yes, on Sirius's death), and another one on my students' experience of growing up as readers with Harry. I don't know whether I'll teach the subject again, or read the saga, I don't know – I'm leaving those doors open. I'm beginning to understand, though, from my students' comments that I'm a very, very lucky teacher. I seem to have hit on a goldmine, full of fond memories of reading the series when growing up and, I hope, soon to be filled as well with the deeper insights that I wish to give my students... and gain myself.

Andrew Mikkola

Harry Potter and Me

It was a hot day in August 1999. The sun heated the faded red deck out off the back door of 308 Pattee Canyon Road. I sat with my knees on the floor and my elbows on a dining chair, watching the birds outside the window. My mother and I had just finished reading *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* together and when I reached up and put my hand on the back of my extremely blonde head I imagined the face of Lord Voldemort protruding from it.

It wasn't with great terror I did this but more curiosity. My 6-year-old mind wandered with my own adventures in the *Harry Potter* universe. I imagined being placed in Gryffindor and learning to fight Lord Voldemort and fantastical creatures with my superior magical abilities. I pushed myself up and slid open the glass door, stepping out onto the deck. The sun warmed my bare feet as I sprinted down the stairs in search of a stick just the right length, with the hope it secretly contained a dragon heartstring or a phoenix feather.

I have my aunt to thank for my introduction to *Harry Potter*. She read the book with her children and recommended it to my mother as something my cousins had loved. So one day we sat next to each other on the ugly cream coloured couch and she read to me about "the boy who lived".

At this point I could read short picture books on my own and was slowly working my way towards reading books like *The Magic Treehouse* series. My patience for reading was good for a boy of my age but usually didn't last more than ten or fifteen minutes. However, when *Harry Potter* was involved it tripled and I couldn't get enough. I was a parched child in the centre of the desert to see what happened next and the only oasis that could quench my thirst was the next chapter.

One of my favourite things about *reading* the books was my mom doing the voices. Even after watching the films when I think about Hagrid talking I hear my mom trying a growling Scottish accent, yelling at the Dursleys'. Amazingly, her Snape sounded a lot like Alan Rickman. When my father would try to read the books to me I would complain and tell him how the voices were supposed to sound. When he couldn't match them the exact way they were in my head I made him stop until I got so frustrated we both gave up. Though she was spot on with the voices my mother did not know how to pronounce Hermione. Throughout the first two books and most of the third the brightest spellcaster of the group was pronounced Her-Moin.

Once the fourth book came out I was able to read them on my own and would go back and read the first three, but I demanded my mom read *Goblet of Fire* to me with all the voices. By this time my younger brother was old enough to enjoy *Harry Potter* and the three of us would sit on the couch each with a cup of tea or hot

chocolate and devour as much as we could. Usually it was my mom that got tired and wanted to go to bed.

Book five was the first one that I read on my own without help from my parents. Our house bought two copies because both my mom and I wanted to read it and there was no way we could come up with some sort of logical sharing system. The text lasted only three days before it was finished and I was already longing for the sixth one.

Book six came out the day I tested for my first-degree black belt in taekwondo. It was July 16, 2005 and one of the biggest accomplishments of my life and when I looked over at the parents during the eight-hour physical ordeal almost all of them had a copy of *Half-Blood Prince*.

I cried at the end of book seven and I am not ashamed of it. Though maybe I think the epilogue was a bit cutesy and I now realize plot holes and problems in the universe she created, J.K. Rowling's work remains one of my inspirations for pursuing a degree in film and studying History. Though not considered literature, her narrative story rivals any created in History.

Now I am a big sports fan but growing up my favourite games were never basketball or football or video games, but going outside with my friends and creating imaginary worlds. We would alternate between *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and things that we completely made up on our own (to this day I'm sure *Avatar: The Last Airbender* stole the idea from us). *Harry Potter* was a major part of my childhood from grade school to present day, carrying into my adult life.

My friends and I play a version of the game 'True American' made popular by the television show *New Girl* which is a combination of trivia, real life Candyland, drinking, 'the floor is lava', and more rules that would fill encyclopaedias. However, there are only three categories for trivia, one of them is *Harry Potter*. I am aware of the irony in a game called 'True American' revolving so much around a series from the United Kingdom but it was so much a part of everyone's childhood, everyone is excited to learn that it is part of the game and we can't imagine another series that is so universal to everyone's upbringing.

I only know a handful of people who never read *Harry Potter* as a child and it makes me sad. That series of books was so influential on my childhood and I feel like I know the characters like old friends. *Harry Potter* was the first series of books I loved and started my enjoyment of reading; it would be a much dimmer world without them.

Alicia Moreno Milrado

First of all, I feel that I need to give credit to the one person that always encouraged me to read, and this person is my mother. She's a passionate reader and always urged me to read. If it wasn't for her, maybe I wouldn't love books, and especially the *Harry Potter* series, as much as I do today.

I remember very clearly the moment I first saw the trailer for the first *Harry Potter* movie on TV and asked her to go to the cinema to see it; she wouldn't let me until I had read the book. I complained, because for a 9-year-old a movie is always more appealing than a book, but I agreed, and I'm sure that my experience would have been quite different if I hadn't. I am really thankful for everything my mother has done to instil in me a love for books that has never stopped growing since the moment she told 9-year-old me to take *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and read it before watching the movie.

Since that moment, I've always been interested in reading and writing and I perfectly recall countless afternoons with a book in my hands, when I was about 10 years old, wishing I had more time and more books in my power. In *Harry Potter* I found, not only a hobby, but also a genre I was really interested in, a role model, a motivation, a purpose, a goal and a reason to believe that my dreams could come true some day. J.K. Rowling gave me a direction, and I was young enough, and impressionable enough, to let it be life-changing. I've been dreaming of being a writer from a very young age, and the first person that made me realize that what I loved most was reading and writing stories, is J.K. Rowling. I want to be who I want to be thanks, in a big part, to J.K. Rowling and this story that marked me so much that I couldn't just let it go.

I believe that words acquire a different meaning according to who is reading them, and *Harry Potter* might mean something different to me than it does to someone else. Looking back at the moment I found out about this series, I can see why my 9-year-old self would be attracted to a world of magic and adventures. Thirteen years after, though, I can't help myself and wonder whether I would have been as attracted today as I was back then, if the series came out now. *Harry Potter* was the first fantasy series that I read and seriously caught my attention, and the first of a very long list of fantasy series, because I just couldn't move on and read other genres after reading *Harry Potter*. I wouldn't have read some of these books that I absolutely love (like Angie Sage's *Septimus Heap* series or Sarah Mlynowski's *Magic in Manhattan* series) if it weren't for this very first fantastic book that I read and how changed my life.

Many people believe that *Harry Potter* has been as successful as it has thanks to money, big productions and marketing, and that those have spoiled it, and I can't really disagree with that. However, I can't be mad at J.K. Rowling for selling part of her rights and let them become another millionaire production because this decision

helped to spread her story and allowed many other people know about it. Many people I know wouldn't touch a book if their lives depended on it, and some of them have never even considered reading the series (no matter how many times they tried). Most of these people, though, have seen all the movies and they probably love the series as much as I do.

The *Harry Potter* series I keep in mind has not being spoiled; it is not being used to earn tons of money; it is not just another millionaire production. The *Harry Potter* series I keep in mind, the one I grew up with, is a story of a boy who fought all of the adversities he found in his already quite tormented life and didn't let anything stop him. How could I be mad at J.K. Rowling or at Warner Bros. for all the commercialization of the series if that may have helped kids all around the world, giving them a role model and helping them find strength in themselves and believe in themselves, just as I did with the books? I'm certain I would be a completely different person today if I had not had *Harry Potter* back when I was a young girl. Maybe I would have different friends, different aspirations and a different life, but if I am who I am today is, partly, thanks to *Harry Potter* and J.K. Rowling –money and big productions and marketing cannot buy that nor take it away.

I treasure some of my memories regarding *Harry Potter*. I remember the moment my family gave me *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as a Christmas present when I was about 12; or the excitement I felt from the moment they announced the release date of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in Spain until the moment I finally had the book in my hands. Most of my memories from when I was younger include one of the books in my hands. I remember reading *Order of the Phoenix*, which is my favourite one in the series, for the first time during the summer and how excited I was when I got back home after summer courses and finally sat on the sofa to read it. I remember crying for hours when I read Sirius's death the first time, and the next two times after that, because *Harry Potter* is not just a series of books. It is part of my life and many other lives and it has made me grow and incorporate certain values in my life that I consider truly important.

Harry Potter has changed my life in many, many ways, and I just can't imagine a life without it.

Laura Montaña Tena

The first memory I have about the *Harry Potter* series comes from the day of my 8th birthday, in March 2000. I probably knew about the first book before that day because I know some of my friends had read it before I did but I do not recall them talking about the book. That day I threw a party for all my classmates and one of them decided to give me the first two books as my birthday present (and I cannot thank her enough for that!). It's been a long time since I last saw that girl, but if I was to talk to her again, I would probably have to thank her for, somehow, changing my life.

I remember beginning to read *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* that same day and I remember how I started reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* just after I finished the first one. After that, I remember having to wait until *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* was published in Spanish. I cannot really remember what I felt when reading them, because I was very young, but if I read them so eagerly, I guess I liked them very much. By then, I guess I had become a complete Potterhead and I was invested in the magic world of Harry Potter.

After reading *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, I don't quite remember what happened until *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* was published but I definitely read the fourth and fifth books at some point. The release date of the sixth book in English, 16th July 2005, will always be stuck in my mind. I went with some of my Potterhead friends to Barcelona and bought the book on the day it was released although I could not understand English that well back then. I was 13 years old when this happened and I had been waiting to know what would happen in that book for a long time. It was maddening to have the book in my hands and not be able to read it.

I remember going to my English teacher and telling her I was going to try to read the book in English because I could not wait for the translation into Spanish (I was an avid internet user by then, and I was afraid of all the spoilers I could read online). Her answer was pretty clear: my command of English was not good enough to understand it. I knew that, but at that age, I was always up for a good challenge. I began to read the book with a dictionary always in hand and I almost gave up after three pages. I used more time looking words up in the dictionary than reading the book itself so I decided to keep reading, even if I could not understand everything. At first, I was lost most of the time, but at the end, it was much better. The second time I read it, I understood even more things.

When the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was published, I had spent two years improving my English and I decided to read it in its original language. This time around, I could understand most of it. Again, I went on the day of the book's release to Barcelona and queued with many other fans. I remember reading the battle of Hogwarts with tears in my eyes, not because it was sad (although it definitely was) but because the series was finishing. Seven years after I first started reading it, I was finally finishing the story, and that made me feel something I cannot describe. As cheesy as it sounds, I would agree with all those people that say they felt like their childhood was ending with the last words of the book.

The same happened to me when I saw the last movie in 2011. I went to the midnight premiere, seeing that on the same day when *Deathly Hallows* would be released the two previous movies would be screened in the same movie theatre. It was an amazing experience that I was lucky to live it with all my Potterhead friends. I remember wearing my Slytherin tie and a hand-made shirt with one of my favourite quotes of the book, which I still have today. That summer I read all the books again. I grew older with the characters of the books the first time, and I think that is the best

way to read them but when I read all the books again, I was able to understand a lot of things I couldn't understand when I was younger and first read them.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone was not my first look into the world of fantasy. I blame my mother for my obsession with this kind of literature. She has always been a Tolkien fan, so when I first asked her to let me read one of her books, we read *The Hobbit* together. Although I loved it, I read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy some years later, after I had already read some of the *Potter* books. Since then, and although I like and read all kinds of genres, fantasy has always been my favourite. Those two stories turned me into a person who enjoys reading, and enjoys books.

The *Harry Potter* series not only helped me to progress as a reader but also as a person and not only because of the moral ideas that this book can inculcate in children. When I was 14, I began joining forums and internet communities about *Harry Potter* and I met a lot of people that have become really good friends afterwards. I have also attended fantasy conventions in other countries and I have had a lot of amazing experiences. The 'Harry Potter fandom' has become some sort of weird family for me and for many other people.

In conclusion, I could say that the *Harry Potter* saga literally changed my life. My obsession with the books pushed me to improve my English and, and here I am now, almost ten years later and studying 'English Studies' with a minor in English Literature. When I chose this degree I never thought the *Harry Potter* series would be part of the curriculum (although I sure hoped so) but here we are, twelve years after reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, analyzing the series in one of my classes.

I know that these books have many flaws (that epilogue!) and I also think that there are some topics in the books that maybe should not be read by little children, but I cannot help being in love with the story, and with some of the characters and locations. If I have kids at some point in my life, I will probably give them the option to read these books that have been so important in my life.

Laia Munné

I first found out about the *Harry Potter* books when I was 7, at my schoolyard. A friend of mine told me she had been given this amazing book and that I should read it. Not long after that the trailer of the first movie was released, and I begged my parents to take me to see it. The day after I turned 8, I had one of the most magical birthday parties ever: I went with a few friends to see *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001). I instantly fell in love with the characters and the school, and soon I was daydreaming about the day when an owl would bring me a letter saying 'We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry'. I remember wanting to know more about that world in which invisible

cloaks and chocolate frogs existed. That very same Christmas, on the morning of the 6th of January, I remember seeing when I woke up this heavy box wrapped in a very colourful paper with my name written on it. It contained the first four volumes of the saga in the Catalan edition. From that day onwards, every night my dad and I would read a page or two of the book together.

We spent quite a long time reading the first book. When I finally finished the second one, the second movie was released, and once again my birthday party consisted of going to the cinema to see, this time, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002). Once again it felt like the best birthday party ever. But this time was even better, because I could see everything I had imagined when reading the book. It made me understand the book further.

I read the third very slowly, because I was frightened to death of Sirius Black, this Azkaban crazy fugitive that somehow was after Harry. I did not sleep well when I read at night, so my dad insisted on my reading it when I were a little older. But I still wished to know what happened to Harry, Hermione and Ron, so I read it some months before the release of the third movie (2004). And then I liked Sirius so much, that I could not wait to read the fourth book because I wanted to know more about him. I really expected Harry to leave the evil Dursleys, who did not like that incredible world Harry now belonged to, and who had mistreated Harry all their lives, to move in with Sirius. I began reading about Harry's fourth year at Hogwarts wishing that they could somehow fix the wrong that had been done regarding Sirius, so that he and Harry could finally become a family. But that book turned out to be something way more exciting than I could ever have imagined. I had already turned 11 at that time and, unfortunately, my letter to Hogwarts had been somehow lost. To my huge disappointment, it had never arrived. But that very same year I found out that other schools of witchcraft and wizardry existed! I still did not give up hope that the school for Catalan-speaking witches would send me the letter.

It took me a while to read *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. So far, it was the longest book that had ever been placed in my hands. And although I really enjoyed it, and I felt like wanting to read all the time, it took me months. My friend Eva and I would take the book to school and read it while the others played football and stuff like that. I have never been a sports girl so it was great to be able to just sit on the quietest spot of the playground with a friend, to read about a character who, to a certain point, was just like us: Hermione. We were sometimes teased about being bookish and freaks for reading and talking about *Harry Potter* all day, but then we would just shout spells against our abusers, which was certainly a lot of fun.

From the day I saw the first movie until the moment I finished the fourth book, Harry Potter had always been there; I never had to wait to know what happened next. But when I finished the fourth book, for the first time ever I experienced how it felt to have to wait for something you badly want. It felt like I needed to read the fifth book, but it was not published yet, so I started looking for new books to read. Through *Harry Potter* I had learned to love reading, so I wanted to discover more stories. From that moment onwards I came across loads of other stories and characters, many of which I

loved, though none of them ever meant as much to me as the *Harry Potter* series. I started devouring books to fill the gap *Harry Potter* had left to keep me entertained until the release of the fifth book. I started by reading the *Narnia Chronicles*, by C.S. Lewis. Then I began Laura Gallego's *Memorias de Idhún*, which had been published that very same year (2004) and which my friend Eva had recommended repeatedly to me.

When the fifth book was finally published in 2005 I forgot about all the rest and ran with my parents to buy it. I had never cried so much with a book as when Sirius died. I was heartbroken. I was the lucky type of girl who had never experienced the loss of a beloved family member or friend, so I was absolutely shocked. My parents were quite worried because they could not understand why a book was affecting me so much. So I just stopped showing to them how sad I was about Sirius out of fear they would take the books away from me. Despite the bad things that happened, the books taught me to keep going, to trust friends, to respect the rules when they ought to be respected and to follow my heart in the important matters. And Harry, Hermione and Ron had become friends to me, together with the rest of the characters in the series. To me they were as real as anyone outside the books. I did not want to lose them.

I waited with the same enthusiasm for the sixth book, and while I was waiting for it I enjoyed going to see the fourth movie. It was great watching the actors grow at the same time I was growing up. It felt like we were all connected. Besides, *Harry Potter* became a very good way of making new friends. Whenever I met someone new if they liked *Harry Potter* as much as I did it was, and still is, like an immediate connection.

After reading the sixth book, it felt like it all was ending. And it also felt like I would have to abandon childhood once it was over. It was very sad, and also somehow frightening, as I would have to grow up, become an adult, and leave Hogwarts adventures behind. I did not want to read the last book, because it meant it would all be over, but I needed to know how everything ended. It was the longest wait ever. Luckily, we had the fifth movie to keep our love and excitement for the series as high as ever. But I knew what happened in that movie, and it was so sad that I was almost crying the whole movie, but then I was disappointed at the way Sirius died in it. It just did not happen the same way in my head.

Two weeks before the release of the final book, I went to a bookshop with my friend Eva and we asked them to keep two copies of the book for us, just in case. And I re-read all the books so that I would have them fresh in my mind before reading the last one. My mum thought I was crazy.

Once the saga was finished there were still three movies left. And it was great because it gave me and all the fans an opportunity to get ready to say goodbye to this huge phenomenon that had filled out childhood with wonderful adventures. Before going to see the last movie, I re-read the whole saga again. I still did not want it to end.

Harry Potter has been a huge part of my life. It was with me from the moment I turned 8 until I was 18 and watching the second part of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2011). I too grew up with this series and I am very glad I did for this is something that happens once in a lifetime. I am still very proud to say I am a Potterhead and that I will probably always be. I have re-read the books many times, each time discovering something new, something that I did not remember or that I did not pay much attention to. Every time I read the books I am more and more amazed with this saga. I have grown more conscious of the power of J.K. Rowling as an author, something which has made me both admire and criticize her. When I read the books for the first time, I did not seem to be aware that there was actually someone writing them, especially the first ones. I never asked myself why things happened in that way and not in another. Now I do, but I still think it is a magnificent piece of work.

When reading the books I never could have imagined one day I would be taking a course on *Harry Potter* at university. But this is a great opportunity to learn why a series of books has meant so much for my own generation and how J.K. Rowling managed to gain that enormous success. What is more, it gives me an opportunity to study the plot and characters from another point of view, to learn more about them and about why they were characterized the way they did. And it is also a way to organize my thoughts and feelings about the saga so that if I ever have children, nieces or nephews I can explain to them what *Harry Potter* meant to me and try to make them enjoy this magical story as much as I did.

Pilar Munné Martínez

I was 11 years old when I first knew about *Harry Potter*. One day, the English teacher came to class and she announced that we were going to see a film in original version with Spanish subtitles. The film was no other than *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. I remember loving the film and since I was becoming much interested in reading, when I got home I just told my father: "I want you to buy me the book from the film I just saw". As I was very young and only told him that it was about Harry Potter, he came home one day with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. I was not aware that this was not the proper book, despite having seen the film, until my sister told me so. A few days later my parents came home bringing me and my sister the first two books of the saga. From the moment I read the first book I took two decisions. One of them was that I was never going to see a film adaptation again without reading the book first, since I found that some details were missing. The other decision was that my favourite literary genre was going to be fantasy. It is still so, when I'm already 23 years old. I cannot thank enough that English teacher for discovering me the world of *Harry Potter* since she opened me the doors to the world of fantasy in general.

I was lucky enough to share my obsession with *Harry Potter* with a sister about my age. We only could afford one copy of each book so we combined reading *Harry*

Potter with other things. This established a kind of competition, or sibling rivalry, that we still maintain. The first one to finish the book then in her hands could take the next book about *Harry Potter* but not before. There were times when I finished reading a book before her but most of the times she was a faster reader than me. This caused peculiar situations. My sister would make funny faces at me as she read, and I always begged her: please don't tell me anything, I want to read it by myself! She had a great time making fun of me for not knowing what was happening in the books she read.

I do consider *Harry Potter* my childhood, just like many other people. Since I read every book aged more or less like Harry, I can claim that I have grown up reading the series. I always say that every time that Harry improved, I was improving as a person as well. When I finally was up to date regarding the publications of the *Harry Potter* books, this feeling increased since I had to wait for the next book to be in my hands. Waiting for a book even for years involved a sort of growing up to become an adult, following the same stages that Harry has to go through in each novel.

Regarding the last book, I first read it in 2007 being 16 years old. I could not wait for the Spanish translation and I was freaking out about knowing the end of *Harry Potter*. I imagine what a hard time my parents had bearing with me and my sister. I know that because they bought *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* the same week it was published in English. I found this quite funny: they owned up later that day to visiting all the bookshops in Barcelona to find the 'damned book'. What was original about my parents buying me the last book in English is that they not only gave me the book but also a pocket English dictionary! I am glad they thought of that useful detail since my English was not very good at that time and I found it difficult to understand some things. Because of my poor English, I re-read the book again when it was finally published in Spanish.

When I was reaching the end of the last book, I was mentally begging 'Please, J.K. Rowling, do not kill Harry!' I am glad she did not, though some people thought it was the right thing to do. I was shocked that she killed Fred but the deaths that shocked me most in the whole saga were those of Remus Lupin and his wife Nymphadora Tonks. They had just become parents and had suffered much, especially Lupin. I was angry with Rowling for not explaining in more detail in the book how they died, just showing us their dead bodies. What also angers me is that everybody was crying because of Fred and nobody seemed to care about Lupin and Tonks. I loved Fred but his death did not affect me, it surprised me, nothing else. What really hurt me was thinking about poor Teddy, becoming an orphan just like Harry. Regarding the last book, I must say that I liked the epilogue despite what other people may say about it. For me, it was a way to close the circle because we see that Harry is finally happy despite all that he went through. This feeling is very well expressed in the last sentence: "All was well".

I must say that my experience regarding *Harry Potter* is not limited to the books only since I have watched all the films. I did not watch them just for simple entertainment but looking for mistakes in terms of how the books were adapted to the screen. I have also played *Harry Potter* videogames about almost every book. In 2011, I

joined a group of people from all around Barcelona interested in the world of *Harry Potter*. Thanks to this group, I was introduced to the world of fan fiction regarding the universe of *Harry Potter*. In that way, I could see some of the gaps that Rowling did not manage to explain in her books especially the one regarding the Marauders' youth. This has always interested me since I would like to know what exactly James did to finally get Lily and what happened in the several escapades to hide Lupin's condition.

Finally, here I am in 2014, *Harry Potter* still important in my life. I still consider *Harry Potter* the best fantasy series ever written though I am not impartial at all regarding those novels. I think I would not be the person that I am without having read those books, I would probably not be the freak that I am nowadays. I am glad to be called a freak because this is part of my personality and it includes my big obsession with *Harry Potter*. I think I will never be free from this obsession and I am happy with it.

Carmen Nadal Cervera

On my seventh birthday (May 2000) I was given the best present I have ever received: the first novel I ever owned. It was the Catalan version of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which wasn't available from many of the bookshops in my town. My parents found it out of town and thought that it was perfect for their child, as I really loved fairy tales. I can't remember the day I opened the present and found it, but what I can remember in detail is when I started reading it, one summer day.

I wasn't the one who turned the first page, my mom was by my side reading aloud while I was trying to keep up. She started the book with me, helping me through the pages and with those strange names –I'm so thankful to her, because she taught me to pronounce the names as they should, not in a Catalan way. She started reading to me the first chapter, and from the second onwards I started reading bits, until I got tired and she took my place. I recall those as very happy times. But the truth is that my mom had plenty to do, and as we approached more intense passages, I couldn't wait for her, and took the book for myself and finished it without her.

I started the first book about June 2000, and by July I had already finished it. My aunt found the only bookshop in town that sold the series, and bought me *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* –this is the third book, so my mom had to go to that bookshop and buy *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. When I finally got the second part, I started devouring it... and commenting on it with my mom, who kept helping me with foreign names and was as interested in the story as I was.

I remember asking for the continuation, and being surprised by the fact that there was someone writing a fourth book, that the series wasn't complete. It was when I discovered that some people called authors wrote books, and this became my ideal profession: being an author. When I got back to school in September, no one

around me had ever heard of the series: not friends, not teachers, not even shopkeepers.

I can tell for sure that the first book was my favourite and with no concessions, but mostly because I couldn't understand everything that was going on during the second and third books. I also love the fact that every time I start reading it, I hear my mom's voice, with her narrator qualities, the perfect emphasis she put just where needed and her ability to disguise her voice to play different characters. When I feel lonely or ill –which is quite the same now that I don't live with my parents anymore– I always go back to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in search of peace, and re-read the book (or just my favourite parts, like the first, fourth and eleventh chapters). I also recall being very worried about Ginny in the second book, which has always made me feel that the character was not well-rounded enough. And falling in love for the first time with Remus, that adorable long-haired and wise man.

But moving on, in the summer of 2001 I read *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, rushing through it like the wind. This got me addicted somehow, but, paradoxically, it is the book I am less close to. A little bit later the first movie came out, and suddenly everyone was a *Harry Potter* fan –most of them not having read the books, and a few reading them at that time. The series became nearly everything in my life: we played Hogwarts during school breaks, I read *Harry Potter* walking to and from school, and I re-read the four books about ten times in a year. In fact, I know most of the first book by heart, including whole conversations and descriptive passages.

It was a great gap of time for me between *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which came out in Catalan in 2004, when I was 11). This had given me time to catch up with the books and understand everything I couldn't understand for being too young; meanwhile, most of the series' hype had vanished into thin air for most people around me. That was really important, because when *Order of the Phoenix* came out, my excitement made people call me "Llunàtica", the Catalan version of "Loony". This was such an important book for me. I got angry at Harry and met my most beloved characters: Luna and Tonks. This book gave me also a recurrent nightmare for a while –with Bellatrix as its main protagonist, sometimes mixed with Voldemort's resurrection ritual in the previous book.

I waited for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* for months, already part of the online community and up-to-date about any news. On 23 February 2006 I found myself finally waiting outside my favourite bookshop; I clung to the book until I finished it. This was too emotional for me, so many things to worry about in no-time. I think it took me months to be finally aware that Dumbledore had really died.

For *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* I couldn't even wait and I ordered it online, and read it in English in August 2007. This was, by far, the book I've cried for the most in my 20 years of life. I remember being always worried, "who will be the next one to be killed?", my heart breaking into pieces with Hedwig's death, the Ministry takeover, Harry's home... And the War... Seeing two of my favourite characters suddenly dead –and poor Teddy. Like most fans I know, closing the last

page was too hard for me, and I did it in tears. I wasn't courageous enough to re-read the last book until Sara Martín asked me to do so for class, but the truth is I'm still struggling to get past Bill and Fleur's wedding.

As it's seen, the *Harry Potter* series has marked me. It meant a lot to me, and the people around me knew this. For that reason, I was given fantasy books for children every time someone had to buy me a present. This started with my mom letting me read her old copies of *The Neverending Story*, *Momo* and *The Hobbit* –and me forcing her to let me read *The Lord of the Rings*. People kept buying me more and more books, and the genres I read had to expand. But the truth is that I've always continued reading fantasy. I've read about vampires, about parallel worlds, about dragons and princesses, about mythology... From medievalist fantasy to young-adult fantasy books, I've always had a special love for children's fantasy, with a focus on what's been called Gothic Children's Literature. Paying special attention to that, my favourite books of all times isn't the *Harry Potter* series –though they are my most beloved– but *His Dark Materials*, by Phillip Pullman, with a special mention to *La Emperatriz de los Etéreos*, a single-volume novel by the Spanish author Laura Gallego García.

Seeing the love I profess for the series, most people are surprised when I admit not having read *The Casual Vacancy*. I haven't read it because, simply, I thought that the argument was not enough for me to buy it. In contrast, I would love to read Rowling's *Cormoran Strike's* series, whenever I have time –and a copy. The difference is that *The Cuckoo's Calling* is a mystery novel, which I'm way into, and not a tragicomedy regarding politics, as the other one is called.

Jaime Oliveros

I still remember vividly my first contact with the *Harry Potter* series. At the age of 7, I was reading in bed when my mother came and brought me a new, green book, whose cover showed a black-haired kid armed with a sword and fighting against an enormous serpent. At first I disregarded it: starting with the second book is not how one should read a series. In less than a month, I read it, forgot it, and left it alone on the shelf without paying it any more attention.

But then, something happened. I remember that for my eighth birthday I got another book about this kid. This time, the yellow cover showed him flying on a broomstick, with a castle behind and a unicorn in the back. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, read the title, and, little suspecting how important it would become to my childhood, I started reading it.

Ever since, I consider that book the best one of the saga. Not because of its quality (I was 8; I did not care about Rowling's craft), but because it offered all the answers my first *Harry Potter* experience needed. There I knew why Harry and Draco

hate each other, why Dumbledore and Harry share such a deep relationship and, most important of all, what the hell was Quidditch.

After devouring again both books (twice in a row, I think), I became really interested in their world. Due to my complexion and my round glasses, I was called Harry wherever I went, but I liked it. He was my hero, along with Ron and Hermione, who provided whatever he lacked (trust and magical knowledge, in my head). I loved the 'Houses' organization which so reminded me of the story in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (which my father was so eager to share with me). But, ultimately, I think that what made me like the series best was the fact that it made me think that anything was possible. That there was something beyond reality, even if I was not entitled to experiencing it.

By the time the third book came out, I was so excited about the series that I got it (I think) the very first day it was published. This brought back that sensation to my mind, and I read it in less than a week. Every idle hour I spent it on reading the book. New creatures, new courses, new magical devices... the book succeeded in bringing me back to my ecstatic reading of the first book. And the hours I could not spend reading, I was playing with my friends, imagining that we were Hogwarts' students, creating schedules and even sending each other some imagined homework.

That source of enthusiasm led me to read with a lot of interest the fourth and the fifth books. By the time those were published I was respectively 10 and 13. The series came to be regarded by the reading public my age as childish, as many thought themselves older than we were. Therefore, my friends and I, who were still adepts, became outcasts. That did nothing but add another layer of excitement to our reading of *Harry Potter*. We really were a step nearer to our heroes, having to keep in secret that we read magic, so we did not feel the scorn that word elicited in public.

At that time a fan-made Spanish translation for the sixth *Harry Potter* book started circulating on the net. I got it and read it (and afterwards bought the book –I was driven by enthusiasm, not by piracy). It left a bitter taste in my mouth, as did the fifth book. They no longer provided me with the same sensation. Harry had become an arrogant youngster, and the world was shifting towards magical politics that seemed extremely similar to the Muggle ones. To me, it looked as if there was nothing else in that world to be explored, and I did not like that. However, I decided that, since this was the sixth book of seven, I would read the conclusion (especially after the ending of *Half-blood Prince!*).

It is strange to think that I read the last of the *Harry Potter* books almost six years ago. I loved the beginning, away from politics and again in the same line as the first books. I cried with some of the several deaths that appeared in the book and when I reached the ending, I pulled a face. I did not like at all first, the resurrection scene in the book and, second, the too traditional ending of the series. Up to this point, I have not read the seventh book again (though I have read the rest of them at least three or four times). I haven't even watched the eighth movie due to that disappointment.

Nevertheless, *Harry Potter* as a whole brings me more good memories than bad ones. When my nieces and nephews ask me if they can borrow the books I am more than glad to lend them. I fear for the time when they get to book six, though, for that was for me the beginning of my disillusion.

I think that what attracted me the most to the series was the fact that it was set in the same world as ours: it brought some magic to the 1990s. Up to then, every tale I read in which there was magic was set in a distant times, and the fact that I could associate places from the book to places from reality was brilliant. I remember joking with my cousin, who lives in the fourth of four houses in an alley, and whose house has stairs and a cupboard door beneath them, that Harry might appear there sometime. However, if I have to think about something that I disliked about the books, that would probably be the ending. I was appalled when I read it. I thought it was a little forced and that the book deserved a better one.

I liked Snape when he was a 'grey' character (not at the end, when his intentions are clarified), but my favourite characters are Luna, Sirius and Lupin in that order. When I got to read about Lupin I knew he would be the best professor of the whole series (although I always sympathized with poor Mr. Binns). As for Sirius, I liked his nonchalant attitude towards the world while being protective towards Harry (who definitely needed someone to protect him). Luna, however, is my favourite. She is, for me, the most naïve character, and that brought me back to what I thought Harry Potter was about: magic, adventures and a light-hearted tone.

And here I am, giving my testimony when I realize that in ten minutes, a lecture on *Harry Potter* is going to begin. I was thinking of writing further about what *Harry Potter* means to me, but I think it is better to show up and argue my point.

Kate Pasola

On Christmas Day 2007, I finally caved in. After years of reluctance to conform to the literary clan of Potterheads, having characterised myself as all too serious a Literature student to indulge in fantastical tales of witchcraft and wizardry, I simply gave in. My mother had been nagging at me to help her choose my Christmas presents, and the indecisive creature I am, things had been left until the last minute. Strangely, I'd kept thoroughly up to date with every film release (I suspended my snobbery towards fantasy whenever popcorn was involved), and even that felt a little overwhelmingly whimsical. But, after overhearing one too many conversations from my impassioned friends who lamented the neglect of 'vital details' in the adaptations, who discussed their shock at the actual pronunciation of the heroine's name they had imagined as "Her-me-own", and who clutched their hardbacks to their chest and piously beseeched that I participate in the textual world of *Harry Potter*, I relented. So, when my mother raised her eyebrows anxiously and explained that she had no idea

what to buy her fickle adolescent daughter this Christmas, I asked for the entire series of *Harry Potter*. Well, if you're going to do it, you should do it properly.

That brings us to the moment when I sat, surrounded by metallic wrapping paper, *Harry Potter* paperbacks and puzzled-looking relatives, on Christmas morning 2007. Of course I enjoyed Literature, but I had never been known as a bookworm of any sort. I remember surveying the books in their cellophane (along with the receipt my mother had left in the kitchen in the event that I had a change of heart), and wondering what exactly I had let myself in for. After dinner, I took out the first of seven books, and by Boxing day I was hooked.

Normally, film adaptations have a way of permeating the world constructed by an author, and this was a reservation of mine when embarking on the series. But, I soon found myself consumed in an original world of Rowling's charming, minimalist descriptions. I found that although they were tainted by my preconceptions of a Watson-esque Hermione and green-screened, Warner Brothers' Quidditch matches, the further into the series I read, the more independent and distinctly significant the original text became to me. I began to realise that the books offered a freedom of interpretation, imagination and creativity that films simply don't permit, and made a conscious effort to develop my own versions of the characters and settings.

I was terrified of Snape, I was infatuated with Ron, and I aspired to be Hermione. And in many ways I still do, because there are few female role model characters I've come across that are as charismatic, bold, strong-willed, forward thinking and compassionate as Hermione. She's clever, loyal and described as stereotypically pretty, and her role in the books gives young girls a role model to whom they can aspire to be – a rare find in a more recent media climate.

Another favourite character was Luna, who unlike Hermione, who does not superficially seem level-headed nor logical, yet proves that "ditsy" and "dim" need not necessarily be considered synonymous. Luna is intelligent, proves vital to the survival of Harry in the final book in the series, and sticks fiercely to her morals. When challenged, she will risk everything to do what is right. She's a strong woman hidden under a dreamy exterior, and, in the words of J.K. Rowling herself, an "anti-Hermione" – a character who matches the heroic Hermione, but who might be admired by those who cannot identify with her bookish stubbornness. The characters are what make *Harry Potter* so special to me, along with the world that is all inclusive, incredibly moral, and is undeniably such an important part of people's lives all over the globe.

When I began university, I began to read feminist literature and found that many feminist arguments align with my personal ideologies. Since then, I have found it difficult to avoid applying a feminist perspective to media, in film, and literature. I am somewhat disappointed with the female presence in the book; I feel that less importance is awarded to the merits, trials, trauma and nobility of the actions of female than the male characters. I am of the attitude that, regardless of gender, Hermione's character would have been a far more interesting protagonist – which leaves me wondering why exactly Harry was chosen by J.K. Rowling. Some may think

that J.K. Rowling ‘sold out’, in her reluctance to disclose her female identity when publishing the books, and in her authorial choices regarding the female characters. On the other hand, I’m simply disappointed that a writer, living in the 21st century must appease archaic, patriarchal tropes and demands in order to protect the success of her works. I think that it is a patriarchal society –not Rowling– who primarily deserves criticism for this problem. Of course, it would have been encouraging if J.K. Rowling could have used her early success as a vehicle for the promotion of women in her later books and brand management, and for the continued mild neglect of female character (relative to the males), she can be held partly responsible. However, it is widely known that the publisher working with J.K. Rowling required that she chose gender-neutral initials; it seems that in her early *Harry Potter* authorship, her floundering success left her with little autonomy regarding her self-presentation as an author. I am of the opinion that at the time of publishing the first book, had Rowling not made certain decisions pertaining to male and female characters, and her own identity as an author, unfortunately her success may not have been quite so stratospheric.

I feel somewhat disappointed that I did not experience the wonder, belief and enchantment that the ‘true’ Harry Potter generation, who grew up and developed alongside the saga, revelled within. Primarily a children’s book, the simplistic language failed to appeal to my preference for poesy and heady descriptions. Despite this, I’ve come to realise that J.K. Rowling’s genius and literary strength does not lie in her writing *per se*, but rather her magnificent knack for storytelling and plotting, and her talent for establishing an entirely remote world, while retaining elements of humour, romance and British tradition which act as thematic side-orders to the main course of magic. I’m thrilled to be participating in a course which can give me an arena for ideological debate of a text which is highly unexpected source of hot cultural, socio-political and literary debate.

Kika (Francesca) Pol Payeras

Un viatge sense retorn: Presoners de la literatura

“No cada dia un compleix 11 anys”. En caure aquella porta, va aixecar-se rere ella, tot un món en el qual poder aprendre-hi a ser més que un nen sota una escala, i en el qual jo vaig aventurar-m’hi, sense gairebé adonar-me’n. Harry Potter i el seu món van arribar a la meua vida, just en un moment en què jo finia aquella part innocent i cruel de mi mateixa, de la meua vida com a infant. Un període nou, aquell en què jo emprendria, també, un nou sender com a passatgera del Hogwarts Express. Dins el cor, un bitllet sense retorn. Un viatge cap a la màgia de l’adolescència. Mai he sabut ben bé com explicar el què em va passar, ni tampoc què, ni com redactaria una experiència d’aquesta mena. Com a mínim, l’he d’adjectivar de singular. Al final però, prefereixo suposar que és una qüestió de pura literatura perquè, *no és la literatura el passaport de nostra memòria?*

En travessar per primer cop aquella paret, de maons ataronjats, i de la mà d'un gegant efímerament desconegut, vaig filar i ensumar que tot allò seria molt més que un company de paper sota el braç i que, òbviament, em quedaven moltes hores per viure, encanteris per realitzar, i molts, molts amics per conèixer. I així, mà a mà, amb aquell llom gruixut i ignot, i amb companys de viatge molt diferents –però, m'agrada dir entranyables– va ser com vaig arribar a l'estació de Hogsmeade. I a Hogwarts, sí, a la casa dels bruixots que han permès a tot un món no-màgic, tenir somnis i viure amb i de desenganys, a beure de la il·lusió de rebre cartes amb un segell postmodernament medieval, i de cremar de nervis pel nostre primer vol sobre l'escombra, i sota la mirada de la increïble Rolanda Hooch.

Tot un cosmos, sens dubte, que mai més podrà esborrar del meu ésser aquesta estranya mania –tan meva també– de somiar per sobreviure, com vam aprendre durant els set cursos, impossibles de resumir en poques i precàries paraules. Mots, que són molts, i que només podem compartir amb els qui hem preparat una *Felix felicis* a les masmorres, hem escapat de Aragog i els seus fills entre la nit i la boira, i amb aquells que hem volat a través dels mars amb un meravellós Buckbeak, que conclogué amb un aterratge salat per llàgrimes, filles de la nostra pròpia història. Llavors, la Guerra havia començat, i ja era massa tard per no batallar, la màgia havia arribat a les nostres vides.

Què és llegir Harry Potter? El quid de la qüestió. Pregunta de simple construcció, de difícil aprehensió i resposta. Llegir, en general, ja és en si mateixa, una experiència que, a mercè d'altres possibles opinions, no acaba de lligar amb la capacitat de raciocini. Almenys no amb la meva. Gairebé sense adonar-nos-en, llegim amb l'estómac, des del desig que ens mou a ser identitats, éssers múltiples i canviants. I és que quan llegim, ens disfressem amb màscares, perquè tenim dret a portar el que llegim com si es tractés de la nostra pròpia vida. Jo no puc concebre, passats ja tots aquests anys i des de la meva primera experiència, els personatges del món Potter com construccions textuais i discursives, com haurien de ser per una teòrica de la Literatura, si és que puc descriure'm d'aquesta manera. El cas de la sèrie *Harry Potter* resulta, en aquesta línia, un cas encara més accentuat, ja que estem davant un món secundari, un món entre mons i a través el qual el paper ens ha acabat sobrepassant, a molts dels seus lectors, la vida real. Segurament no vaig ser l'única que, en llegir “Feia dinou anys que a en Harry no li feia mal la cicatriu. Tot anava bé”, va sentir un dels buits més grans com a lectora, com a bruixa, i gairebé com si hagués patit la pèrdua d'una família que sempre portaré dintre meu.

De fet, totes aquestes frases, que poden semblar d'una certa dolçor, bé de caràcter emotiu o recargoladament retòric –amb l'efecte llagrimeta inclòs– són reiterades per algun motiu, sentides, segurament, per més d'un lector, encara que potser semblin un simple joc en clau d'emoció barata. Tant és, perquè em reafirmo en el fet que llegir és sentir, amplificar el sentit de ser el que no som mentre no somiem deserts. Diuen, i segueixo creient sòlidament que la bona Literatura és la que pot llegir-se en graus diversos, la que pot tenir diferents lectors, i aquella que és desmuntable en capes de lectura que van més enllà d'un sol color. Això passa amb la sèrie *Harry Potter*. I és que tots aquells que vam tenir la sort de passar set cursos en

dos mons, el Muggle i el màgic, vam anar aprenent a ser lectors sí, però simultàniament als coneixements que adquirien els nostres amics mags, paral·lelament a una lluita que es pressentia com un final que ens destruiria, i amb ell, tot el món que tant ens vam 'molestar' en imaginar. Però les portes no són les mateixes per tothom, i hi ha moltes maneres de tombar-les, tal com Hagrid fa el primer dia de la resta de la vida del jove heroi Potter. Els lectors són com el JO, diferents, sentits i variables en la mesura que viuen en un moment o altre. És cert que l'experiència és un fet que no es pot reproduir amb exactitud a través de les paraules, senzillament, podem teixir alguns silencis amb la voluntat de mostrar el món que hem après, aprehès.

És important, tot això, perquè un *Harry Potter* llegit amb 11 anys, no és el *Harry Potter* que llegeixes als 16, i per suposat tampoc als 40. Per experiència, i amb la meua, que és molt propera a la vivència dels set cursos en un present gairebé real, he de relatar i confessar que no només sóc lectora, sóc re-lectora i tot això forma part del testimoni i la raó de tot aquest recargolat discurs. Per mi, el Harry fou un heroi perquè compartia amb ell la taula de la classe de defensa contra les forces del mal, i en Snape m'atemia amb els seus càstigs. Més tard però, vaig redescobrir el coratge de l'individu marginal i de l'heroi de l'heroi en Severus Snape, de la importància de la dona i la saviesa de les bruixes com un pilar fonamental en els estudis de gènere i la narrativa. Els bestiars medievals van adquirir importància en el meu creixement com a filòloga, i vaig ser filòloga, entre altres raons, perquè Harry i el seu món, em van permetre pensar que era possible anar més enllà d'un món on, o toquem de peus a terra o, en l'extrem contrari, viatgem fins a l'infinit a terres que mai podrem inserir en la realitat.

Avui, després de totes aquestes experiències i sensacions, de dies de mudances i recerques d'Horricreus, d'escapatòries d'Azkaban com a animags, i d'haver begut, potser massa 'butterbeer' (o batut de bescuit!) a 'Les tres escombres', m'adono de la importància que té "aquest" *Harry Potter* a la Literatura, i tot el suc que em permet treure'n de cara al futur com a literata. Tot i que sóc conscient de l'existència d'una llarga tradició de novel·la meravellosa o fantàstica en les diferents literatures del món, que van des del primer *Frankenstein* de Shelley fins a *La història interminable* d'Ende, i les narracions que mai ens acabarem, em resulta necessari explicar la primordialitat que té, literàriament, l'obra de Rowling.

Com a filòloga i investigadora primerenca, centrada en el camp de la teoria literària, vaig prendre, un dia, la decisió de treballar per primer cop i a fons sobre aquesta sèrie. No només per l'interès que la història i la trama despertien en mi, que ja fa quinze anys que em va atrapar, sinó per la immensitat d'aspectes que pot arribar a abraçar aquest món. Un univers que, al cap i a la fi, ha estat perpendicular al que la gent màgica entendria com el nostre món Muggle. Un món mediocre i que se'ns queda petit després de tants partits de Quidditch o tantes excursions clandestines a la cabana del Hagrid, per mirar per la finestra les curiositats del bosc prohibit.

Justament, l'última part de la meua experiència Potter, i ja com a adulta, és l'estrictament literària. I com a persona literata i literària, com a un personatge més de tot el relat d'experiència, crec que és gairebé impossible concebre una estructura

narrativa que, tot i els defectes que no són pocs, sigui tan completa i desglossable. Per tot això, després de tantes paraules, vaig veure la possibilitat de fer amistat amb tots els personatges que, per sort o desgràcia, Rowling secunda i fa secundaris a partir de la figura de Harry. Uns secundaris però, que fan possible aquest procés de construcció identitari i que donen una varietat temàtica susceptible d'anàlisi, sens dubte. No menys important em sembla recordar dos aspectes més, també essencials, com són la presència i importància del gènere a la novel·la i del tret històric en què alguns hi han fet incís, encara que sempre pensaré que no prou després de viure una guerra, avui clarament, tan propera a la qüestió del nazisme i la segona Guerra Mundial. Per tant, m'agradaria recordar la importància que han tingut tots els homes de *Harry Potter* i la cultura de la diferència en les figures de Snape, Sirius o centaures corrent pel bosc en tant que podem veure els problemes del patriarcat, però fer una crida alhora d'un cert menyspreu a la figura femenina. Tenim secundaris sí, però en diferents graus. No m'ha deixat de resultar estrany en cap cas el fet que cap dona tingui un pes extraordinari, a banda de la dictadura exercida per la maleïda Umbridge que tant ens va fer patir.

Dictadura? I tant! Estàvem a una Guerra màgica, jo vaig lluitar i vaig ser perseguida, vaig plorar, i amb la vareta de coa de fènix, vaig conjurar un *Fidelio** mentre les estàtues sobresortien dels seus murs per protegir un castell que s'enfonsava, a cavall entre el bé i el mal. La puresa de sang és i serà un aspecte que dóna també a *Harry Potter* la clau de la història-ficció que, en l'àmbit literari, fa la sèrie encara més interessant i digne d'estudi. Estem, per tant, davant d'una narrativa que gairebé podríem titllar no només de postmoderna, sinó d'hipermoderna, híbrida, eclèctica. Una narrativa que, sense més, ha sabut combinar gèneres clàssics, medievals, Romàntics i, per suposat, meravellosos, en tots els sentits que l'adjectiu pugui prendre. La combinació és quasi perfecta, en relació a la catarsi que un lector professional pot experimentar en descobrir-hi la infinitud de les seves capes de lectura. De nens a dones, d'homes a persones majors. Tots hem batallat, tots ens hem ofegat, tots ens hem llegit en el diari secret de Riddle, i tots tenim el temps a la nostra memòria, que reté, gràcies a la literatura, els colors sobre els quals pintarem aquesta experiència. Una experiència que, més enllà de les paraules, serà part de tot allò que vulguem ser. Literatura, i res més.

*NOTA: L'encanteri *Fidelio* és un encanteri d'un nivell complex i que serveix per ocultar una ubicació determinada. És l'encanteri del qual en fan ús els bruixots de Hogwarts a l'última novel·la per protegir el castell de Lord Voldemort i el seu exèrcit de Mortífags.

Montserrat Pons Nusas

The first time I heard of *Harry Potter* it was from my best friend in elementary school. I remember that she explained to me the story of the first book in the playground, which I found very strange and difficult to understand.

Eventually I went to the cinema to see the first and the second films with my mother and my older sister. My sister and I loved the films and thus, my mother decided to buy us the third book. My sister read to me little by little the whole book. Every night she came to my room and read *Harry Potter* until her voice got too harsh to continue. I enjoyed the book but, above all, the experience that I was sharing with my sister. At that age this was one of the few activities that my sister and I could do together without arguing.

My sister started reading to me the fourth book when it was published. However, she soon stopped. Even though I insisted many times, she would never read to me the books again. Then I understood that even though we couldn't enjoy the books together anymore, I could enjoy the story on my own. I had never felt so interested in a plot before. As a child, *Harry Potter* contributed greatly to my imagination. My family always reminds me of the day when I slipped a handmade ear down the stairwell, as if I was trying to eavesdrop on their conversation as the Weasley twins did.

Nevertheless, the reasons why I loved the books as a child and as a teenager are still a little unclear to me. I think that the story seemed real and close to my own reality. The school where I spent sixteen years of my life was huge and had plenty of passages and forbidden floors. It would seem that a religious school for women would be too strict to look for adventures, but in fact, it always gave us room to move around the place quite freely. My friends and I spent plenty of time discovering new places as Harry and his friends did.

My passion for the books never decreased but my point of view towards them changed through the series. For example, as a little child I hated the bully Draco Malfoy but as a teenager I fell in love with him.

Harry Potter became without knowing it, part of my life. As a teenager I had several arguments with my cousin about whether Severus Snape was good or bad. I must admit that she always defended him to death... I also started to use expressions that became common in my everyday life. For example, in an ordinary conversation we would commonly say "you know who, and it's not Voldemort" when you were trying to avoid the name of the person you were talking about.

We all read the books and most of us were already reading fan fiction on the Internet. We also liked to write stories together, and one of them was based on *Harry Potter*. I think that in a different way than in my childhood, *Harry Potter* provided me again with many great moments.

Even though the series ended, I felt I could not let it finish that way. I continued reading fan fiction because I had the need to know more about the characters that had accompanied me during all those years. Those stories kept alive my passion for the books as well as providing me with alternative plot resolutions. Dealing with Fred's death, for example, was a very hard thing to do.

Later on, I started university and gradually I met people who also liked *Harry Potter*. We shared our passion not only for the books but also for fan fiction. We had in common thoughts and impressions. At this point the webpage Pottermore for beta users was released. We all were impatient to sign in and we talked about it very often. I had never thought that after finishing high school I would be excited about *Harry Potter* again.

The greatest moment, however, was when I visited the studio set in London. It was a present for my twentieth birthday from my partner, and I think I will never forget it. I think that the greatness of *Harry Potter* is that it keeps my childhood alive. Now, there's nothing else that makes me feel as a little girl as much as *Harry Potter* does.

I don't remember who told me last academic year that in the following year there might be a subject on *Harry Potter*, but at first I didn't believe it. Could Harry become part not only of my personal life but also of my student's life? At the end it seemed so.

The news was received with shock by my friends. For them, it was difficult to understand how *Harry Potter* could be read in a critical way. However, I think this is the following step to continue with this unique experience that is *Harry Potter*. I've lived the story as a child, as a teenager and as a young woman. Every time with different people and different perspectives. Now I'm living it again as a budding literary critic.

I would like to read the *Harry Potter* series to my children someday. Who knows? It might not be fashionable or maybe they are not interested in plots about magic. However, I would like them to enjoy the reading and experience their growth in this special way. It might also be a new opportunity for me to go through the series once again.

I didn't read Rowling's following books because I liked her as a writer for children and I am not interested in her writing for adults. Besides *Harry Potter*, I've never been interested in other fantasy books, either. Fantasy is something that fascinated me as a child but not very much as an adult. I'm not sure what would have happened if I had been an adult when *Harry Potter* was first published. Probably I wouldn't have given it a chance. Luckily, I gave it a try when I was a child, and that is something that I will never regret.

Hongyu Qian

The first time I encountered *Harry Potter* was around 2001 when I was still an elementary school girl and our teacher organized for us to watch the movie *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* together. The memory is rather fuzzy and the only

maintaining chips are the disgusting snot flowing from the monster to Ron and the crocodile line along the plane trees with us, little guys, walking happily towards the cinema.

Perhaps it's not an appealing beginning but it didn't block my future contact with *Harry Potter*. During my elementary school, I picked up the books in Chinese and it was the words that drew my attention. The book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* seemed much more impressive than the movie (the same happened with all the other movies), which drove me to read *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as soon as I finished the first volume. Thanks to our school library, bright and clean, where I used to read, I grew totally absorbed into Harry's wonderland and forgot about time.

Year after year, I followed the steps of Harry, both book and movie, both Chinese and English, which left an indelible mark on my childhood and youth. There is even one incredible experience about Harry when I was in high school. That was a sunny afternoon. When I was walking towards the cinema to watch the movie *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* with my friend, the sky suddenly changed. The sun was blocked! Dark clouds and a wild wind turned the calm day into a chaotic night. The sun was swinging into the cone of shadow cast by the moon. It was a solar eclipse, a solar eclipse before *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*! How thrilling!

My favourite characters are Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood, the two girls, a couple of opposites. Hermione, the girl possessing a brilliant academic mind, very studious and bookish, annoying at first but accepted and loved by others as a result of her wisdom and loyalty to her friends. I love smart girls and always believe this incredible know-it-all is a kind of trusted think tank to Harry. The use of cool logic in the face of fire saved her and her beloved friends countless times. She holds a belief in reason, also acting like an embodiment of justice (particularly towards the house elves).

Luna, an extremely quirky girl with distant and dreamy behaviour and voice as well as many eccentric beliefs and qualities, was a complete nonconformist. She seemed to lack self-consciousness as she wasn't afraid to show who she truly was, which I do appreciate a lot. However, she was also highly intelligent and unusually perceptive, and possessed a serene disposition as she was completely unflappable and rarely seemed anxious or under stress, even under difficult circumstances such as being a prisoner of Malfoy Manor. She is also a sweet girl, very good at comforting others, for example, when she comforted Harry Potter after his godfather's death.

The two girls are quite different and did not have an ideal first meeting. Hermione was frustrated with Luna's belief in all manner of things without proof or logical grounds, whereas Luna believes that "wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure". But eventually they simply accepted their differences and became really good friends through Dumbledore's Army. They are both tough girls. Harry himself describes Luna thus when she's kidnapped and feared to be in Azkaban: "She's tough,

Luna, much tougher than you'd think. She's probably teaching all the inmates about Wrackspurts and Nargles". I never get bored with this kind of trust between friends.

All in all, It was an amazing journey reading *Harry Potter*. The books have even appeared in my dreams many times. As a little bookworm, I used to enjoy fairy tales but also realism and detective series. J.K. Rowling led me to a magic realism world where everyone, everything is so fantastic but so genuine. No hero, no great man, no god.

However, after *Harry Potter*, I haven't touched any other fantasy. Other books seem too similar and somehow lacking creativity. Besides, *Harry Potter* is a little hard to overcome. I haven't read either Rowling's other books for adults. Not yet.

Mònica Reina Martí

My first experience with *Harry Potter* was watching the first film *The Philosopher's Stone* (2001) at the cinema, the truth is I can't remember if I liked it very much or not, so probably it didn't make a great impression on my 10-year-old self. A few months later, I received the second book *The Chamber of Secrets* as a present from my parents for Sant Jordi's day (*Harry Potter* had already become famous in Spain) and I remember reading the first pages and getting really bored. I don't know exactly why because I loved stories and fantasy when I was a child; I guess I just didn't get into the story or I simply didn't like it.

Later on, by the time I was 13 years old and the third film *Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) had come out, my cousin Irene, who was a huge fan of the series (I remember she had *Harry Potter* posters all over her room), introduced me to the *Harry Potter* world in a very passionate way and persuaded me to give it a second chance by lending me her books. I was really curious to find out what especial thing *Harry Potter* had that everyone loved, so finally I decided to start reading the first book and the adventure began!

I think I got hooked onto the story very quickly; it didn't bore me as it had done three years before. I loved every following book more and more, I couldn't wait to get home from high school and keep reading. I especially remember enjoying the fifth book *Order of the Phoenix*, where some Hogwarts students rebel against Umbridge's educational system and they secretly teach themselves and create Dumbledore's Army. I also enjoyed discovering more of Snape's past in the sixth book and the fact that he called himself 'The Half-Blood Prince'. Although I felt a bit of pity for him, I never truly trusted him (until his true intentions were discovered at the end, of course).

Regarding the seventh and last book, I had to wait a couple of years to read it, since the Spanish translation didn't come out until February of 2008. By that time, I

was in a 'Batxillerat' (secondary school) trip, in London of all places. Many of my classmates, including me, were very excited to visit places such as King's Cross station (yes, we took the picture of the wall with the half-hidden trunk at Platform 9 ¾ !). We also went to Oxford and visited the places where they had filmed the Great Hall, the staircases and the corridors in the movie adaptations. As soon as I arrived in Barcelona back from my English trip, I rushed into a bookshop and bought the seventh book.

I absolutely enjoyed the last book, not only for finally knowing how the story ends but also because it's very different from the rest of the series. The action takes place out of Hogwarts (except towards the end) and the fact that Harry, Hermione and Ron's friendship is tested by really tough circumstances this time is really interesting, we finally see their true fears and insecurities.

I also remember everyone being terrified about thinking that Harry would die in the end; in fact, there were many rumours about this. I frankly didn't want Harry to die, he was a survivor and I like it when survivors in books do survive in the end, even if some people around him/her don't share the same luck. As regards the epilogue, I didn't think it was as horrible when I first read it as I think now, but I do remember feeling a bit of disappointment for being a 'too perfect ordinary happy ending'. I guess Harry needed that happiness after all; he wanted to be a father and he needed the quietness he had never enjoyed as a young boy.

One of the things I loved most in *Harry Potter*, and this might sound very 'Hagrid-like', was Magical Creatures; I find them so fascinating! I think if I was a student at Hogwarts my favourite subject would be something like 'Fantastic beasts and where to find them' (the title of the textbook, I know) and similar stuff. I guess that's why I had a certain 'crush' on Charlie Weasley while reading the books, so mysterious and always somewhere far away with his dragons. I don't know why but this sounded appealing to me!

I think there wasn't anything I didn't like about these books, probably Fred Weasley's death, I found it the more devastating and unnecessary death in the series. I also found disturbing the discrimination towards Hufflepuff, not only in the books but also in real life, I remember everybody wanted to be Gryffindor or Ravenclaw or Slytherin! But no one would choose Hufflepuff... I had prejudices about Hufflepuff, too.

In Rowling's official website Pottermore the Sorting Hat places you in a House after taking a test with a handful of questions. I remember wanting to be sorted into Gryffindor or Ravenclaw and surprise, surprise... I was sorted into Hufflepuff! I didn't like it at first but now I'm really proud of being a Hufflepuff. I found, all in all, quite interesting to see how some ideas in a book can be easily transferred into your own way of thinking.

I'm currently re-reading the books and I realize there are some things I don't like now that I didn't realize back then, all the gaps and questionable issues we're discussing in class.

Overall, I love *Harry Potter* for the same reason many people of my generation do. I have shared all these adventures with Harry, Ron and Hermione, and I was literally growing at the same time as they were while reading the books. I began reading them at 13 and finished reading them at 16, now it's seems such a short time but it was a huge transition actually. In my personal case, then, these books are not my childhood but my adolescence.

However, there are many people who aren't from my generation that love *Harry Potter* as well (for example, my aunt). So there must be something else in these books, which is unique to them: no matter how old you are, when you finish reading them you have shared so much with all the characters that you are inevitably attached to them for ever. And *Harry Potter* has seven books! As the narrator comments in the first book: "There are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other". And I think that's exactly what happens.

Also, I think there's a high sense of belonging to the Potterhead fandom that is very important to consider. Probably the movies helped to increase and prolonged that phenomenon (since the last and eighth movie came out in July 2011, quite recently). There is a huge community of fans that still feel connected with these books and other fans, even though it's already been three years. I think it's something that will last and stay with us all our lives.

Writing this reading experience and having a look backwards at your own life, you realize how much impact *Harry Potter* has had in it, how this story and these characters have been there with you wherever you went. I think that is one of the greatest achievements, apart from the narrative and the diversity of characters, that these books offer.

Apart from *Harry Potter*, I've only read a few fantasy books so far: Laura Gallego's *Memorias de Idhún* (I only read the first book, I haven't finished the trilogy yet) and I'm currently reading George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, which I love very much! I'm really looking forward to reading *The Hobbit* too; I think as I grow older I'm enjoying fantasy stories more and more.

I haven't read any of Rowling's books for adults and honestly, I'm not very interested in them (perhaps I fear they may disappoint me), so for the moment, I prefer reading other kinds of books.

Kyle Ritchie

I first discovered *Harry Potter* and the world of wizards and witches at the age of 10, not long after the release of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. My family was on a vacation to Disneyland in California, and though I had packed my requisite eight to twelve books, my mother had brought along one extra, *Harry Potter and the*

Philosopher's Stone (the fact that as a Canadian I read the original British versions and not the Americanised books remains a pointless source of pride to this day). My mother's decision was not an effort to get a TV-addicted son interested in reading. I was already a voracious reader, and I think she was simply excited to help encourage this habit. Another parent, probably at my school, had told her that this book had helped her children love to read, and so my mother just wanted to help ensure my interest in reading did not wane by offering me *Harry Potter*. I refused to read it.

I am unsure to this day why I did not want to accept the book my mother offered me on the plane to Anaheim. As far as I can tell today it was a combination of stubbornness (I routinely refused to eat foods I had never tried and would later love claiming that I could not possibly like them) and possibly an effort to compensate for what I may have seen as my bookish nature. Perhaps too keenly aware that I shunned rough-housing and sports at lunch break for solitary reading, I believe I compensated by reading books about things I knew a boy should interest himself in: sports, swashbuckling adventure, detective stories. This did not last long.

On the plane ride home to Vancouver, I broke down and accepted my mother's offered book. I had finished nearly all my sports stories, and besides, they were starting to all blur together. I craved something different, which *Harry Potter* delivered in spades. It's not that the plot tropes or characters or even the magical setting were truly unique, I had seen these things before in various configurations. Yet there was something about the Wizarding world that was simply different, that I still cannot put my finger on today. Perhaps it's the combination of genres; of adventure story, fantasy, gothic, children's literature, boarding school story, sports story and outsider tale. Perhaps it was that Rowling's writing aimed perfectly at my age group and inquisitive mind. Whatever the case, I devoured *Philosopher's Stone* in the 4 hours it took to fly home, and finished the next two books in the series within two weeks after that.

For the next seven years, *Harry Potter* remained an integral part of my life, as I aged with the boy-wizard, finishing school around the same time he did. For seven years I immersed myself in *Harry Potter*. Sure I read and loved other books. I even liked many more than the *Harry Potter* series. But there was no book or series that was as much a part of my life as *Harry Potter*. I read and re-read each copy, attended midnight book launches and movie premieres, re-enacted scenes at public library readings, volunteered to do voices in primary school readings, and painted a lightning scar on my forehead on more than one occasion, whispering spells in my bedroom. My sister and cousins and most of my friends all knew the books and movies. Not everyone was obsessed to the same degree, but nearly all my peers knew where to put the accent on *Wingardium leviosa* and the meaning of the word Muggle. If there were two things that defined our generation, they were 9/11 and *Harry Potter*. The Wizarding world, if not in our blood, was embedded in our collective consciousness.

At the age of 19, tired of life in Vancouver, I moved to Montreal, taking with me few possessions. My battered *Harry Potter* copies were not among them. It's not that I didn't still hold nostalgia for the series, but that it now seemed childish to me, not

fitting for a college bookshelf full of Orwell and Asimov. Science fiction seemed more grown-up to me, full of ideas and not just adventure.

Re-reading the series for me has been both a very familiar and a unique experience. Though I have read each book perhaps an average of four or five times, they were all during a formative period of my youth. It's not that I didn't learn and perceive new things about the books with each reading, but that this reading process was inextricably caught up with my process of growing older. Harry's bildungsroman was my own. Hogwarts was undetachable from my experiences; I could no more take an objective eye to it than I could my own birthday party. This has been my first time re-visiting the world of *Harry Potter* in six years, and the first time I've had a chance to critically analyse the series in a way I had never been capable of.

On re-reading the series I am struck perhaps both by its childishness and its maturity, and the way these contradictions interact as the series progresses. Each book functions well as a detective novel, with the challenges increasing with Harry's age. A younger reader can derive satisfaction from reading the Mirror of Erised backwards while older fans puzzled between books over the R.A.B. Locket or the identity of the Half-blood Prince. Magical concepts and plot devices such as portkeys, polyjuice potion or *The Quibbler* serve not just their immediate plot purposes, but inform the later books and add depth to the universe. While criticism of Rowling's writing may seem legitimate at times, with a writing style in the later books that does not mature as well as the characters or plots, her control of emotional prose remains strong throughout. Rarely do moments that could seem cheap or hackneyed fail to fully hit the reader, one is always keenly aware of the characters emotions and there are deep empathetic links between them and the reader.

One thing that has become more apparent to me during this re-read is the complexity of Rowling's racial critique, both its strengths and weaknesses. The fascinating blood purity ideology of reactionary families such as the Malfoys is much more interesting to an older reader, and the horror of Voldemort's *coup d'état* and subsequent fascist regime is infinitely more real and terrifying at 24 than at 17. Wizarding society in the first books had always seemed relatively anarchic, the Ministry of Magic has nowhere near the kind of control or power over its population that Muggle governments do. With each individual wizard or witch having untold potential powers, it is remarkable that people are free from surveillance until they cross the societal taboos of Unforgivable Curses. However, Rowling's books are also grounded in a postcolonial Britain that yearns for the glory days of empire. Minority characters are few in the books, and the racial issues that seem most pressing to the Wizarding world are between humans and non-humans such as centaurs, goblins and elves, incomprehensible Others who can never truly integrate into a human society. Rowling, though positioning the protagonists and readers against Voldemort's discriminatory ideology, fails to fully critique or address the reactionary society of the Wizarding world that is so resistant to change and open to fascism.

Change comes slow to the Wizarding world, and progress seems to be met not just non-democratic status quo government but by frequent reactionary movements

(Grindelwald and Voldemort being only decades apart) that attempt to prevent what little change occurs. While most citizens do not appear to support such open authoritarianism and discrimination, there is no desire by the Wizarding community to help Muggles, Muggle-borns, or non-humans, or to open society up to them. The vast majority of the population holds stereotypes of these groups as inferior and uphold a society that perpetuates discrimination against less than pure-bloods. There is no evidence in the end of the series, not even in the epilogue, that Wizarding culture has progressed on this front. While open fascism and discrimination is shown as wrong and is ultimately defeated, the subtler forms of structural oppression that exist, such as those that Hermione tackles in SPEW, are not made important to the struggle against Voldemort. There is no liberation movement coming for the less than pureblood subalterns of the magical world, and little evidence of a cultural shift. While Muggle-borns like Hermione and Lily may no longer be discriminated against as openly, even the 'good guys' such as Hagrid will continue to be surprised by their prowess and feel the need to defend their abilities. There does not appear to be any help coming for the peripheral giants (who aided Voldemort out of resentment for wizard society that displaced them from their homes) or détente with goblins concerning property rights (in the chaos of war goblins such as Griphook take the opportunity to reclaim magical items they have never considered to belong to wizards, not believing in Wizarding private property). The conservative society of the Wizarding world is ripe for change yet Rowling, caught up in the glory of magic and its small-town, traditional values, limits her critique to anti-discrimination, ignoring the possibility of reform in the wizard world for democracy, economy, or racial relations.

I do still read fantasy today, fairy tales such as Neil Gaiman's or epics such as George R.R. Martin's still hold appeal for me. However it is not a genre I avidly consume, preferring science fiction still to this day. Perhaps the conservativeness of Rowling's tales is inherent to the genre, which seems to always look backwards while science fiction looks forward. Perhaps this is nonsense (Terry Pratchett comes to mind to critique this) and I still hold negative associations of fantasy with childishness, due to its links to my own youth. I can't say. I have not read Rowling's books for adults nor do I plan to. I fear her prose in an adult setting would disappoint me, revealing flaws heretofore unseen in *Harry Potter*. Even if *The Casual Vacancy* could thrill me with its prose, I have no desire to read. The punch of Rowling's familiar writing is too tied up for me with the magical world, with my youth and the personalities of Hogwarts school. Here, my heart still lies with Harry.

Camila Rojas

The first book of the *Harry Potter* series was released in the United States in 1998 as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I was 6 and in first grade. The following year, I was beginning my love affair with reading by engaging with the *Magic Tree House* series. After finishing all released books to date, I moved on to tackle harder texts. So, when in fifth grade (2000), I received the first book in the *Harry Potter* series

as a gift, I was glad. Once more, I had a book series I could latch onto and absorb into my being.

I remember sitting down enthusiastically to read the tales of a human being swept away into a world of wizards and magic. I was excited and ready to embark on the journey. Unfortunately, the interest didn't last long. I found the books language too simple and wasn't moved by the words. I quickly placed the book on the shelf, and continued my life.

It wasn't until the first movie appeared a year later that I remembered the series. After watching the adventures on the big screen, I wanted to once more attempt to immerse myself in the story. Unfortunately, I was left disillusioned and unhappy yet again. I gave up hope on the books.

Years later, after all the movies had been released, a friend bet me I couldn't read all the *Harry Potter* books in a month. Upon accepting his challenge, I embarked on the mission of making it through all the books. Once again, the first book was difficult to get through. I wasn't as interested in the story. However, the more I read, the more consumed I became in the stories. By the third book and the introduction of Lupin and Snape, I was invested in the story. The imagery and language began to blossom.

By the fourth book, I was in love with the characters and hoping they would succeed in their journeys. The growth the characters experienced forced me to recall my own growth in life. Also, I began to see how the stories were growing darker. No longer were Harry, Hermione and Ron innocent children sucked into unfavourable circumstances by outsiders; they now initiated contact with Death Eaters and by the end, decided to take control of their destinies instead of letting them happen. This shift in the characters, as well as the growth of language and images, are what finally made me fall in love with the series. I felt as if I was finally reading a book where the characters take control and act instead of letting others control.

Since I had already seen the movies, there weren't many surprises for me; I was aware of most of the plot points and twists. However, having this knowledge did not keep me from crying when Sirius, Dumbledore, Lupin, Tonks, Fred, and all the others died. In fact, their deaths were harder to accept in the books due to Rowling's extensive development.

I grew to love Rowling's ending scenes more than the movies. When Voldemort couldn't keep the crowd at Hogwarts silent due to Harry's sacrifice, I cheered. When Mrs. Weasley beat Bellatrix, I roared with laughter! When Neville rose against Voldemort and beheaded Nagini, I smiled broadly. And when Harry faced off with Voldemort in the middle of the Great Hall, I gasped in anticipation.

The obsession that had started in childhood for most other avid *Harry Potter* fans, began the moment I finished the books. You would think that after completing the series, I would be able to move on to the next. But, I couldn't. The moment I put

down the last book, I longed to pick up the first one once more. In fact, when I returned to university and informed my friend that I had indeed won the bet, I bombarded him with theories about the books and characters.

Upon the announcement of Pottermore, I knew I would have to be one of the lucky few initiated into her beta testers (I succeeded!). Then, I had to buy all the movies. Finally, I found that enough time (about a year) had passed and I could re-read the novels.

While I enjoy the books every time I read them, the first time was special. As I was introduced to the characters, I felt as if I was becoming acquainted with lifelong friends. However, what I found interesting was that the characters who fascinated me the most were in fact not the protagonists: Harry, Ron and Hermione. In fact, I had the most affection for Neville, Luna, and Ginny.

J.K. Rowling's ability to create such rounded and complex characters also allowed me to grow intrigued towards Tom Riddle Jr. and Dumbledore. The pasts Rowling painted for them displayed my long held belief that evil is not born, but made.

Ultimately, while there were actions I would like to have seen changed in the book, I enjoyed them and finally understood why the devoted readers were protective of the texts. I was proud to finally call myself a 'true' *Harry Potter* fan and enter the marvellous Wizarding World of J.K. Rowling's imagination!

Clara Román

I distinctly remember the day I got my first copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. I had never heard of J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter, or anything of the sort, but on Christmas 1998 my aunt gave me that book. The cover already piqued my curiosity: a boy flying on a broom? I had always been into magic and reading, so this was a perfect combination. Add to it the fact that I was 10 years old, practically Harry's age, and I was hooked.

From day one, I adored everything about *Harry Potter*. The atmosphere was incredible, and I absolutely loved the universe Rowling had created: Diagon Alley, the owls, the old and mysterious books, the amazing Hogwarts castle, Hogsmeade, and even butterbeer. And I don't even like beer. But to me, Rowling had a way of making everything perfect. Even the characters were spot-on. Of course, I was in my early teens.

Every year I waited impatiently for the new book to come out, and since I could not read in English at that time, but could read French, I would always buy the French copy since it would come out before the Spanish one. Many names were different in French (Snape was called Rogue, for instance), which confused me a little bit, but no

matter –when later the Spanish edition would come out, I would buy it as well.

And then came the movies, and I loved them too. I liked the books and movies so much that I would read and watch them –at least– once a year. I had obviously imagined the characters differently: Ron was taller and thinner, Snape was younger, Hermione *really* had bushy hair... but I did not really care. And so I read every book as it came out, until eventually my English was good enough to read books four, five, six, and seven in their original language.

I would go as far as to say that the *Harry Potter* series has changed my life. Perhaps not drastically, though its effect on my psychological well-being cannot be overlooked. For a very long time I suffered from anxiety, having panic attacks on an almost a daily basis. *Harry Potter* was a way for me to escape the fear, to enter a world where practically anything was possible and that seemed to be specifically catered to my taste. Indeed, I had always loved old libraries, dusty books, walking through quasi-impenetrable woods, and often imagined myself wearing a black cloak and producing a variety of spells and potions. Even in my twenties, I often regret never having received my letter to Hogwarts.

Still, I do not think *Harry Potter* is perfect. Far from it. As I've grown older, I have kept the tradition of re-reading the series once a year. And each time I read it, there is something I had never really noticed before that starts bugging me. For me, it is like reading *The Lord of the Rings* again and getting a bit tired of Sam and Frodo's story. I can't really explain why. With *Harry Potter*, it hasn't been a character development or story as much as specific moments, or some traits that I don't fully support.

Harry, for instance, has always seemed somewhat whiny, and while I don't think there is anything wrong with complaining, sometimes it does get annoying. He has this tendency of wanting to do things by himself, and with time, one cannot help but notice how on most occasions he gets out alive because of sheer luck, or because of his friends, not because he is particularly smart. Hermione, on the other hand, is a very good character, and it seems sad that J.K. Rowling didn't dare have her as the protagonist. I guess male characters tend to sell more, which is an absolute pity.

I also appreciate the character of Molly Weasley. She is motherly, yet strong, a stay-at-home mother who is never afraid to speak her mind.

Snape, however, is a character that I will always be conflicted about. I understand the tragedy of his story, and how many readers consider his actions heroic, but for me it is not that simple. I see it as a bit far-fetched at times. Is it really possible for him to spend so many years playing with Voldemort and Dumbledore only because of his love for Lily? What if he hadn't been in love with her? Would he then be the faithful servant of the Dark Lord? Not only that, but the way he treats his students during his time at Hogwarts is very questionable.

While many elements of the *Harry Potter* series seem problematic as I grow

older and more open-minded, it is still obvious that these books have had an incredible effect on my life. I still read them when I am sad or stressed, and know how to take a step back and forget about the things I like less. I haven't read anything else by J.K. Rowling, nor have I ever really been into fantasy young adult books. I wasn't reading *Harry Potter* for its author, but for its story. So, naturally, her adult books don't appeal to me that much.

I have, however, enjoyed the series *Wildwood*, written by The Decemberists' frontman Colin Meloy with amazing illustrations by his wife Carson Ellis. Although I love magic and the mysterious, I am usually drawn to books that have an aesthetic that I like. *Wildwood* takes place in a forest and is permeated with creatures like wolves, eagles, and many other talking animals. It also features a female character as its protagonist, which I think is very important –variety is essential and people need to see that girls can also be strong.

A book series that I started reading while *Harry Potter* was still going on is the *Molly Moon* series, but I soon lost interest as, at the time, it almost seemed to me like a cheap knockoff of J.K. Rowling's books: Molly is a young English orphan girl who one day wanders into the library's restricted section and finds a book on hypnotism...

I have to say I still haven't found a book that has meant to me as much as the *Harry Potter* books have. People think it weird, since I'm a Literature student, but sometimes a book is meaningful to someone not for its literary feats, but its story... Of course, I thoroughly enjoy reading Kurt Vonnegut, and Raymond Carver, and many others... but I grew up with *Harry Potter*. And I am glad.

Fran (Francesc Albert) Ruiz Galera

I have never been too much devoted to the Christian faith; nevertheless, we all celebrate our patron saint's day at home, since we get small presents. It was back in 2003, when I got my first *Harry Potter* book because of that celebration. I was given it by my uncle and aunt, who also turn out to be my godparents, and who were also very aware of my profound fondness for reading. I only remember that Saturday afternoon, when there was a small family meeting on the ground floor of the house, with all my relatives down there... and meanwhile, I was upstairs reading as if there was no tomorrow.

The first book delighted me very much. I remember the following week, trying to make myself levitate through the school playground with a wooden stick in my hands (I confess I also tried to petrify one of my teachers), and nobody except two of my closest friends knew what was I talking about. Of course, in those times I was a proud Gryffindor –I own that to my early innocence, poor me. So, I couldn't wait to read the second, and I asked it for my birthday.

Every single book I was given, I read it in less time than the previous one. I was avidly, desperately, wanting to know how the story continued. It was due to this bad habit of reading frantically that I missed a great deal of details and descriptions the first time around. Of course, I used to re-read all the books once and again, so this problem was rapidly sorted out. I remember spending almost a whole weekend –1 day, 2 hours and 23 minutes, exactly– reading *Order of Phoenix*, only getting out of my bed to eat and go back reading again. *Half-Blood Prince* took me a little longer, since I had been told (damn spoilers!) that an extremely relevant character would die in the end, and I didn't want to skip anything. I also wanted to follow carefully the explanations of Dumbledore on Voldemort and his Horcruxes.

However, once I got to *Deathly Hallows*, I was very reluctant to start it, because I knew that if there was a start there would be an end. It may seem something crystal-clearly obvious, but nevertheless I got a hard time when opening and reading from the first page onwards. I took my time, however, to read it, since I wanted to slow down the post-reading depression, and I wanted to enjoy the reading as much as it pleased my imagination with plenty of details, something that I hadn't done in the previous books due to my reading starvation. Once I closed the last page, I reckoned there was a huge sense of emptiness deep inside me, somehow as if I had let a very old and good friend go. I knew my reading career –if we may call that 'reading passion' so– would never be the same after reading *Harry Potter*.

One of the things I enjoyed most about the saga was the whole variety of magical creatures. As I had been since very little really fond of magic creatures and monsters, the monstrous (and not so) creatures in the whole saga, such as Fawkes the phoenix, the huge basilisk, Fluffy, Buckbeak, or even the Hungarian Horntail, simply amazed me. There wasn't a day when the Basilisk didn't kill Harry in my mind (for God's sake, the king of serpents against a 12-year-old boy!, let's show more respect to such a monster!) or when a whole horde of hippogriffs (or even dragons!) attacked Voldemort in his attempt to conquer Hogwarts and kill Harry.

I found in the Marauder's gang (with the great exception of Wormtail) an exact reference to what I knew as the perfect friendship: people one would trust with his life, brothers that would be by your side until the end. I was so impressed by them that I occasionally asked my best friends to call me 'Padfoot' (which, unsolved mystery, in the Spanish translation was 'Canuto', something they found really funny). Needless to say, I was tremendously shocked when Sirius died in *Order of Phoenix* –I dare to say I was depressed for a couple of weeks, since he had become a more important character to me even than Harry himself. When I read about Lupin's body lying next to Tonks's, I thought I would throw myself out of the window. It was quite unfair of Rowling to condemn baby Teddy Lupin to the same destiny as Harry, and also that Fred or poor Colin Creevey were killed in the battle –or even Dobby! Like many others, I found myself quite pleased once Nagini killed Snape, only to find out some pages later how an amazing and honourable man he had been in the past.

However, I found it unfair, in my view, that Molly Weasley killed Bellatrix, since I had two better candidates to do such the job: Harry, indeed, or Neville Longbottom

himself. I'm of the opinion that Neville wasn't given the chance to perform the action that could have made the difference between the teen Neville and the adult Neville. By killing Bellatrix, Neville's time would have come not only to claim revenge for the tortures his parents were exposed to, but also to prove himself as a grown-up man, with the same sense of family pride than justice.

That way of thinking also crossed my mind many times through the saga. It is true that, as the main good character of the story, Harry, cannot think of killing anyone in his goodness, as he would fail in his imperturbable sense of moral. Nevertheless, Rowling failed in providing the characters with more ordinary human feelings, such as anger or a desire for revenge. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, we see a Harry full of hatred because he thinks he is facing his parents' murderer, Sirius, but this state of mind vanishes almost instantaneously, and he ends up choosing to listen to his story.

I must confess that reading the whole saga again has been as if I had never read it before –I still got overexcited once Lord Voldemort gets his own body again, and I still got to the fifth book yelling inside, trying to persuade Bellatrix Lestrange not to kill his own cousin Sirius. Also, I have enjoyed this second reading in another language, since it proves to me how exactly I remember all the dialogues in the Spanish version. Fantasy and science-fiction have always been in my reading schedule –they have been, actually, my whole reading schedule– but I cannot remember any other book that has marked me such as the ones on 'the boy who lived' did back in the day.

Mireia Sánchez Orriols

I cannot exactly remember how I discovered the *Harry Potter* series, I suppose that I heard about the books because of the media, or maybe because *Philosopher's Stone* reached the local book store. I think that I was around 7 years old when I read the first book. I remember that we had to choose a book to read in class and we had to write a little summary or something similar. Whereas most of my class mates choose to read the typical books for children from the well-known collection *Vaixell de Vapor* I chose *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (I think that I read it in Catalan). My teacher, if I recall correctly, thought that it was too long because she told me to read just a part of it. I read, anyway, the whole book and I remember feeling really proud of myself (I have binged on books since I was a kid).

It is difficult for me to remember when I exactly read *Secret Chamber* and *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but it should have been when I was around 7 or 8 years old, from 1999 to 2000. I remember really enjoying the first three books. As a kid I was always particularly attracted to stories that had magic as a topic, which is why the *Harry Potter* series were a total hit for me. I remember that in class we talked about whether our parents knew the content of the books, or if they read them with us and I think that possibly my mother read part of them, though I am not really sure.

For my eighth (or ninth? I am not really sure) birthday my brother decided to give me as a present *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in English. My brother thought that it was a fantastic idea to give an 8-year-old a book that was around 600 pages long in English. I really liked English but obviously I was not prepared for a book like that (or even for a book in English in the first place).

I clearly recall that I tried reading it during summer using my *Oxford Pocket English-Català Dictionary* but it was really frustrating and I quit. I still have that book, the first sentences are translated in pencil at the margins (and I even translated 'Riddle' as 'misteriosa' so it is pretty obvious that I didn't understand a lot of the book).

I don't know why my brother thought that this was a good idea or that I was going to understand anything but I stopped reading the *Harry Potter* books for some years after that. In 2001 the movies started to come out and my parents used to take me to the cinema to see them. They say that while I was not scared of the books I was a bit scared of some parts of the movies, although I do not remember anything that caused me particularly terror. At any rate, besides being scared (according to my parents) I really enjoyed them. I remember buying lots of merchandising marketed with the success of the movies (and I still have some things): from the videogames to the cards with the pictures that changed with the temperature. Yet, after my failure in trying to read the fourth book it seemed that I was not interested in continuing reading the series at all.

I did not continue reading the rest of the books until before the movie *Deathly Hallows Part 1* came out. This means that until around 2010 I did not continue with the books. Seeing that the end of the movies was close I decided that I needed to finish reading the series. Although I already knew everything that happened (or, well, at least the major plot points) I really enjoyed the experience and I was glad that I decided, finally, to finish reading the books. It was different from when I read the first three ones, and I cried quite a lot (and finally I was able to read them in English!). I wish I would have continued reading them when I was a kid and thus experience the growing up of the characters at the same time as I grew up. Still, although I read the second half of the series as a teenager I really liked them and I think that this let me understand more things. It might also be that continuing with the series took me that much time (after my failure trying to read it in English) because none of my friends in those years was interested in *Harry Potter* and I did not think a lot about the series.

Regarding whether I read fantasy or not I have to say yes, I do. I have always read about nearly anything in the genre and since I was a kid I really enjoy fantasy books. For instance, as a teenager I started reading *The Mortal Instruments* saga and *The Infernal Devices* and I still love them, and now I am currently reading *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Concerning Rowling's books for adults I have to say that I bought *A Casual Vacancy* when it came out but I have not read it yet. At the beginning it was because I had much work to do but later because of all the bad reviews that it got. I was not interested in reading it anymore, I may give it a chance this summer.

Begoña Sánchez Zaballos

More than ten years have passed and I still remember the first time I heard about the *Harry Potter* books. The memory is as clear in my mind as if it had happened yesterday. I think this proves how significant these books have been for me.

I do not remember which year it was, I guess it might have been around 2001-2002 since I started reading the novels more or less at the same age Harry enters Hogwarts, that is, at 11 (I'm 22 now). I was at home with my mother and she showed me a magazine from a book club, at the bottom of one of the pages they were advertising the four first books about Harry Potter. My mother explained to me a little about the books and asked me if I would like to read them. They seemed interesting so, I accepted to do it and she bought the novels for me.

To be honest I wasn't very impressed by the first three novels, I say the first three because with the fourth one was different. I recall that I couldn't stop imagining Hagrid until I saw the first film, something strange I know, but the way J.K. Rowling describes him made me imagine him as a kind of good-hearted troll or ogre.

When I read *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* I got very surprised when I discovered that Tom Riddle was actually Lord Voldemort and I realized he was a really dangerous and wicked character, something I had never seen before. When the second film was released in video format my parents bought it for me and I have to admit I was scared of watching it alone. The whispers in the corridors, the blood on the walls, spiders, people being prettified... too creepy for me. Not now, that is one of my favourite movies and I actually like creepy things. I don't know if *Harry Potter* has something to do with it, maybe it does.

The third book... Well, as I said the first three didn't cause a great impact on me and it took me a while to finish *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. I remember someone telling me: "Read it, read it! This is my favourite, their pets become a very important part in the novel, there's a new character and you will discover something very exciting!!" I finished it. J.K. Rowling surprised me again with all the Sirius-Peter Pettigrew story and made me develop a special affection for Black himself. I would regret that later.

For reasons unknown the fifth book was released and I hadn't finished the fourth one. I hadn't even started it, to be honest. I was kind of tired of this wizard boy and the stories didn't engage me enough. Here enters my mother again telling me to read the books. She told me to read the fourth one because the movie was going to be soon on cinemas. Besides, she had also purchased the fifth one for me, since I said I wanted to read it, and now the two books were sitting idle on the shelf.

I don't remember the year, I just remember it was summer, I was on holiday. I started the fourth book and the world disappeared for me. I had never encountered

such a haunting book, I couldn't put it down. I didn't want to go out I just wanted to read. The fourth book finishes and Cedric Diggory dies. What?! I thought this was a book for children! How does she dare to kill a character? As soon as I finished the fourth one I started the fifth one. I reach the end and Sirius dies, some tears are shed... Cedric Diggory's death was nothing compared to this. It was the first time I cried reading a book. As I said before I was really fond of Sirius, he was one of my favourite characters. Despite this incident, the fifth book became my favourite. It is the one I have re-read most times. I especially remember the first part of the book, when Harry is hiding below the Dursleys' window and the author gives a clear and I think very touching and detailed description of Harry's feelings regarding Cedric's death and Voldemort's comeback. While reading it I could feel Harry's rage, anger and sadness. I particularly love the final part when Harry thinks Sirius is in danger and part of Dumbledore's Army goes to the Ministry with Harry to save him.

The fifth film was the biggest disappointment of all the eight films paradoxically, or maybe because the book I love most is the fifth one. The fifth film is the one I hate most since I expected much more. I remember leaving the cinema with my aunt, very angry and upset. My aunt is another relative who accompanied me through all this *Harry Potter* reading experience. She read all the books at the same time as me and she came with me to see all the films. She had to bear all my complaints about the movies because I was never happy with them (she was a bit less demanding than I with the screen adaptations).

I had to wait a couple of years for the publication of the sixth book. And like the first time I heard about Harry Potter, I remember this moment as if it was yesterday as well.

It was 2005 and I was ill at home. It was in the afternoon, the woman from the book club was bringing me the sixth book the same day it came out. I opened the door very excited but to my disappointment there had been a mistake. I had read all the other five books in Catalan and the one she was giving me was in Spanish (character's names and spells change from one language to another). I didn't know what to do. Should I wait or should I read it in Spanish? I guess she realized how upset I was because as if magically she remembered she had one book in Catalan for another girl who wasn't at home when she went to deliver the book. She gave it to me. The book was in my hands but, as I have said, I was sick and had a terrible headache. I was anyway willing to read it and I couldn't help it so I started the book. I had heard that in this book readers were going to discover that a character was actually bad. I'm talking about Snape, of course. I thought this was going to happen at the end of the book but to my surprise this happens in the very first chapter. I was shocked, I still had hope for him I thought he wasn't that bad. Well, J.K. Rowling would restore my hope in the last book.

I read the sixth book in less than two weeks, but one of my classmates was faster than me and he spoiled the end for me. He told me Dumbledore died. I didn't believe him. Ok, Cedric was dead, Sirius was dead but, Dumbledore?! He was a key character... I thought he was teasing me. He wasn't. I was very amazed when that

happened but I have to say that I wasn't sad. Dumbledore wasn't one of my favourite characters; if so, I was sad for Harry.

The sixth novel is also my favourite. I loved all the details we are given about Voldemort's life, which I find very interesting, and I think this helps us to understand the motivations of the character. I also love horcruxes, I think the writer has created something very original and imaginative there.

Finally the last book, where it all ends. It all ended for Harry and the others but also for me and I guess for many other readers as well, since the end of *Harry Potter* meant the end of a stage of my life, my childhood. No more waiting, no more stories, no more Harry, Hogwarts or Death Eaters.

I found the seventh book quite interesting. You get to discover many things but in a way it was also a bit disappointing, not only because Dobby dies, but also because of the ending. I wanted Harry to die, it sounds bad I know, but I think this would have provided better closure. I heard many times on the news that *Harry Potter* wasn't a book for children anymore, and the ones who started reading *Harry Potter* since it first came out were already grown up enough to bear his death. I didn't like that fairy-tale, obvious ending when the hero always wins. Something else I didn't like was Harry's reaction in the duel against Voldemort: his use of the *Expelliarmus* spell and that moral perfection Rowling grants the protagonist. That's another story, though. And, of course, how could I not mention the epilogue? Reading the epilogue I was more conscious than ever that I was not a child anymore and that this was over. Surprisingly I didn't cry when I read it. I did cry when I saw the last film. When I went to see the movie some years had passed since I last read the book and when I heard that Harry called his son Albus Severus it was as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water over me.

Some of my life memories regarding *Harry Potter* are so vivid that as I have said at the beginning this proves *Harry Potter* wasn't just another book for me. I can't claim that the *Harry Potter* series awakened my love for reading, since I have always liked reading. And I don't know if it contributed to my liking fantasy. It's true that after reading *Harry Potter* I read many other fantasy writers like Tolkien, C.S. Lewis or George R.R. Martin, and maybe if I hadn't read *Harry Potter* I wouldn't have developed an interest in this genre. However, what I know to be true is that *Harry Potter* taught me that a book is not simply a book.

For a while (at least while you are reading it) or forever, the characters in the series become real for you. You can love them, pity them, hate them and fall in love with them. You can cry for their loss or be happy for them. In a way they become a part of your life. Now, every time I read a book I look for these connections. Very few times have I felt so strong a link as I did with *Harry Potter* but, I think it is because with the *Harry Potter* novels it was different. First of all, because seven books are many pages, many stories and many experiences but also, because I grew up with *Harry Potter* and reading this series I experienced things that I never did before. I didn't know reading was so magical...

Iulia Schimbatori

My first contact with the *Harry Potter* saga came when I was just a little girl. Nearing the day of my eleventh birthday, I was presented with a book: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. It was about a young orphan who grew to be a wizard. I must confess that, at first, the notion of a little kid doing little magic tricks didn't sound thrilling, but, due to the insistence of my friends, I decided to give the first book of the series a go. And boy, was it worth it! In an afternoon I had already devoured a big part of the book, and, days later, after blowing the candles of my birthday cake, I couldn't help but feel disappointed when no owl came to announce my admission to a fancy wizardry school.

I had some trouble getting the second book (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*), since my parents wouldn't give me any money and it was always unavailable at the library. Finally, a friend of mine agreed to lend me her book but she wanted it back the following week. I didn't have any trouble since I ended up reading the whole book in only three days. In between classes at school I always managed to sneak out to continue reading; when I got home I would keep on reading and, at night, my mom had to turn off all the lights in the house since I didn't want to sleep, I just wanted to go on reading the book. I even tried to speak parsel tongue, but, due to the impossibility to get a hold on a snake for practice, I ended up turning to French instead.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, the third book, was the one that turned me into a die-hard fan of the series, despite my heartbreak when Sirius, my favourite character and the uncle I always wanted, died. I swore revenge, in a way, and started a commitment to the series; I wanted to see that despicable Voldemort rot! Unluckily, the universe wasn't on my side, and I found no way to get a hold on a copy of the fourth book. It had not been translated yet, and word was that it would be a while until a translated version saw the light of day. So I found myself forced to acquiesce and wait. But I have never been a patient person, and I ended up looking for an English version of the book in an obscure foreign book store in Barcelona.

Reading *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* took me a little longer than the others. Although I had a good level of English for my age, I still needed to have a dictionary by my side while reading. In this book I started to see the dark side of the series. When reading the book at night with little light I really began to worry for my own life. I was conscious that it was only fantasy but I kept willing that to be real. Voldemort was terrifying but he also contributed to give more excitement to the story.

The next book, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, was a total disappointment for me. It was too thick and the feeling I had reading it was that every page was full of nothing. The story wouldn't capture my attention as the previous books had, and in the end I ended up feeling I was reading it as a chore, just to get it over with. Still today I find myself unable to remember what it was about; in fact,

before the sixth came out I had to ask for a brief summary to a friend, because I honestly couldn't remember a single thing! Just something about pens that carved sentences on Harry's hand. That part in particular had me traumatized, as reading through those sections of the books would bring to mind numerous memories of being punished at school as a kid, and endless hours just writing the same sentence again and again and again while time just dragged. Horrible. By the time I finished the book I felt like I had just overcome an ordeal.

Luckily, my disappointment with the Harry Potter series ended with that book; the sixth volume of the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, managed not only to bring back my childhood passion for the Potter universe, but it also managed to adapt it to the darker and more mature era of my teenage years. With a darker atmosphere and surprising plot twists, it managed to keep me hooked and wanting for more; the final epic fight at the school against the Dark Lord's forces was pure adrenaline, and it managed to get even better with the book's final revelations. This book made me see such a key character as Snape, a tortured but humane villain, under a different light; and, thanks to this, Severus replaced Sirius as my favourite character in the series. I could not wait for the seventh book to come out to hear from him again.

But years went by and, before I could realize, the final book of the series hit the streets, amidst a massive upheaval of the fans, who could not accept that there would not be any more Harry Potter adventures after it. I didn't count myself amongst them; I wanted to know what happened, how everything ended, and, especially, what would Snape do. And *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, albeit dragging on slightly at the beginning, did not disappoint. The book was a masterpiece, the perfect ending for the series, and a wonderful portrait of the tortured mind of Severus Snape, whom I like to consider the true protagonist of the series.

The end of the series, though, hit me in a special way. Harry Potter was like a friend for me, who was always there while growing up. The ending coincided with my maturing, as well as his. The saga encouraged me to keep reading more fantasy books, like *The Hunger Games*. I'm now willing to read *Game of Thrones*, but I first want to end reading some other pending books.

Lottie (Charlotte) Seymour

I trialled many hobbies as a child: horse-riding, ice-skating, dance and piano lessons. The usual fads for an adventurous 8-year-old. By the time I began primary school, my parents were terrified of what my next venture into extra-curricular activities might be. So, you can imagine their delight when I asked to attend the (free) 'reading club' at our local library on Saturday mornings. It was part of a scheme to get young children enthusiastic about literature and fiction. After diving headfirst into Roald Dahl and his contemporaries, we were asked to take home a copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. I barely put it down to brush my teeth. The

magical, alternate universe where nothing was quite as it seemed, children ruled the school and were able to successfully tackle life-threatening challenges gripped and enthralled me instantaneously.

In my first year of primary school I was selected (perhaps only due to my unrivalled passion for the book!) to read passages from *Philosopher's Stone* for a local radio station. A studious but introverted child, this gave me an enormous confidence boost and undoubtedly helped contribute to my love of the books and my adoration for English Literature in general.

Hermione appealed to me as a central female character. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say her personality influenced me enormously when younger. Similarly to J.K. Rowling, I saw her characteristics reflected in myself and longed for the ability to be as confident with my intelligence as she appeared to be. I was also starting to get involved with amateur theatre and found myself highlighting her lines in my dog-eared copy of *Philosopher's Stone*, strutting around and claiming that it was 'LeviOSA' not 'LeviosAR'.

There are many aspects of the books that I think appealed to children of a similar age. Because of the strong bond with the characters, the readers are incredibly susceptible to the moral codes projected within the text. The underlying issues of bullying are prominent throughout the book, not just for the young protagonist. Luna Lovegood is a powerful character that I feel teaches children not to neglect people just because they seem different or odd. As readers, we are taught to be accepting of werewolves, giants and house-elves alike and this is key to denouncing racism and discrimination within a generation. Children long to be 'special' and the idea of 'not belonging' is an enormous worry, especially in the teenage years, so Harry's tale is even more appealing. There is also the mischievousness of their adventures, the ineffectiveness of authority and the mockery of some of the adult figures. Another alluring idea is the ability to change not only your appearance, but to disappear completely.

My love affair with the series grew as the following books were released periodically, but not too irregularly, helping open the world of Literature to me further. I extended my reading to other genres, but mainly the fairy-tales and adventure fiction for children, even attempting *The Hobbit* thanks to my brother's persistence. However, nothing could take my mind off the long wait until *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*; it almost drove me to insanity.

I remember we were going on holiday the day after the release, so I insisted on having the book for the trip. We were up at dawn, queuing outside WHSmith for hours. After securing a copy, I clutched the hard-back book close to my chest, and within seconds I was lost in the old, familiar world, but this time with a sense of foreboding. By the first chapter I knew the tone had changed, this time it was darker and much more gothic.

After *Goblet of Fire*, the wait increased to two or three years at a time for each book. I began secondary school and started reading other literature, I found my only link to the series was when the films were being released. Although enjoyable, I've never found an adaptation that has done the books complete justice (until the Swedish film adaptations of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*). The films had increased the popularity and created an entire franchise for the younger audience to worship. I found this frustrating and still do. When *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was finally released, it was the fastest selling book of all time and still holds that record. Although in the throes of adolescence, I cleared my reading schedule for the final few books, though not as religiously as I had previously.

I found myself more sceptical and thoroughly aware that this was classed as 'children's literature'. I began to doubt Harry as a protagonist. His character seemed non-relatable and far-fetched as a teen and the concepts that appealed to me when younger no longer felt relevant to my interests. Although I was now deeply involved in the social (or some may say anti-social) side of my teenage years, my love for Literature was firmly established. I was in awe of J.K. Rowling, knowing her back-story and the struggle she endured to bring the world of Harry Potter to life.

I never anticipated that I would one day be studying the much loved series at university. The concept of studying *Harry Potter* and approaching it as an academic source has been captivating, although putting aside my passions as a fan is extremely difficult. I adore questioning the motives of the author and pondering on the further workings of such a mystical world. In particular, the critical analysis of characters and systems in place are fascinating, I've never enjoyed unravelling and re-writing everything I ever thought I knew about a world that I once loved so much.

Yao Sihang

The first time I heard about Harry Potter it might have been on TV. I saw many children my age snapping up a book. At that time, I was curious and thought that one day I could read that book too. And gradually, I got to know that the book described a magic world, and the author was a single mom.

During that time, I was learning English and one day finally, I mustered up my courage, ran into a foreign language bookstore, and bought the first three volumes of the *Harry Potter* series.

I can't remember clearly how long it took me to finish these three books. I can certainly but also vaguely recall that the process of reading the first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was really tough. My dictionary got quite damaged as I continued struggling with it while reading the book. When I started the second book, I was too lazy to find out the meaning of every word. I skipped the words or sentences I couldn't understand. The first word I learned from *Harry Potter* was 'wand'.

The happiness of reading is that you don't know what will happen in the next page. When I was reading the first book, I was attracted by the character Snape, when I learned that Snape tried to save Harry in the match, I began to believe that Snape was a 'good' guy. And at that age, the way I distinguish the good from bad might be ridiculous, but I believe my thoughts and views of that age are the purest and the most innocent. I thought Snape was good but no good at delivering.

And after that, we saw the 'real Harry' in the movie. I recall watching the first, the second and the third movies on DVD at home. I borrowed a pirate copy from a classmate of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and I couldn't even see clearly how professor McGonagall turns herself into a cat. I was so frightened that I hid myself behind a cabinet when Harry fights Voldemort.

When it comes to *Goblet of Fire*, I recall finding the book a little bit expensive. My mother complained that I spent money and studying time reading this kind of fantasy. Fortunately, my father supported me to read every kind of book and I am glad that I have people standing in my Harry Camp.

Then I became a member of the Bertelsmann's Book Club. And since BBC is a British company I could book the English version of *Harry Potter*. And I could get the new book as soon as it published. About *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), I secretly asked my father if I could get a copy, my father immediately accepted my request and didn't tell my mom. The day when the book was delivered to my home, my father was at the office and my mom uncomplainingly signed and paid for the book. So here I would like to thank my dad who always supported me in my reading of *Harry Potter*, my mom who paid for the book, and Bertelsmann, the best book club I have ever known, although they eventually quit the Chinese market, long ago.

Reading *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) was a miserable experience, nonetheless. It was too thick and I put down the book after the first chapter. When I took the book again, I had already forgotten what was said in the first chapter and had to read it over again.

During one summer camp, I happened to meet a British old man. I told him that I enjoy reading books. He asked what kind of books I liked. I thought for a moment and answered those books like *Harry Potter*, with magic. Then he recommended to me *The Last Apprentice* by Joseph Delaney. Compared to *Harry Potter*, I like the world outlook and atmosphere better in this book.

When the film *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* was released, I participated in my country's movie premiere at midnight, which was free. Before the movie, I saw many people cosplaying *Harry Potter* characters and I took many pictures. After the movie was over, I walked home and couldn't sleep all night. By the time I read the sixth book, I didn't really like Harry Potter. I thought he always misjudged

Snape. When Snape takes Dumbledore down, I insisted that it was fake; the death of Dumbledore was just pretend.

Finally, the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* came out. I got the book in the shortest possible time as usual. I remember how at that time, whenever I heard the word Harry in people's talk, TV program, radios, I would run away as I was afraid of spoilers. When I saw that Snape was finally cleared, when Harry Potter told Voldemort that Snape loved Lily from long ago, when Harry sent his own kids to school and told them about the origin of their names, I was deeply moved.

When I turned the last page, I suddenly realized I had grown up with *Harry Potter* not for only for one or two years, but for ten. Yet, when I entered my university back home, I could hardly find people around me who shared the same interest with me. When I came to Barcelona and heard about this course, I knew that my memories of ten years would come by again. This proves that my love of *Harry Potter* was never a lonely pursuit.

Sara Soriano Melgares

The first time that I learnt about *Harry Potter* this was in high school and because of the 'Catalan Literature' subject; this is why I started to read the first volumes in Catalan. Then, when I finished the subject, I switched into Spanish. I remember discussing avidly with my classmates the books. I must say that the atmosphere of excitement around the series was huge. I remember the expectation of the fans on the day when each new book was launched, when they all appeared on the media.

I first read the first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) two years after its publication. My initial impression was good. I thought that it was an original story; something that I was not used to reading. Even when I was a child, the genre that I liked most was (and is still nowadays) suspense. I loved authors like Agatha Christie. Rowling's books were something new and fresh to me, the books inspired me to imagine all the things that were being described there: the spells, Hogwarts, and also the characters.

My story with the *Harry Potter* series was not love at first sight, though; I must say that I have had to retake the books and re-read them to truly appreciate them. It might be because comparing to others I did not follow the series as J.K. Rowling was publishing the books; I stopped reading after the third book *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The reason why I stopped reading was not because I disliked the series; it just simply happened.

I have read the books at different stages of my life, so I have different perceptions of them. When I started reading *Harry Potter* I was a 12-year-old child and

I found the reading very entertaining, original and fresh, as I said. It's true that at that time I was not an experienced reader, or, rather, I should say that I did not have the maturity or awareness to read between the lines and see the depth of the text. When last year I met Sara Martín Alegre to ask her to admit me to her Cultural Studies class for her elective subject, she warned me what the whole subject was about *Harry Potter*. I told her that I was not a fan and had not read the whole series. Worried as I was because of my lack of enthusiasm about *Harry Potter* but wishing to take the subject, I decided to give Rowling a second chance.

Today I have a different vision about the series, because I have re-read the books I already knew and the others in my late twenties. Also I think that I am more capable of reading between the lines. I have identified the topics which *Harry Potter* deals with such as racism between Muggles and wizards and so on, and this perception is quite more interesting than when I read them the first time, as a child, what I labelled 'just entertainment'. In addition, I must admit that my favourite characters are Ron and Hermione. To me, Ron is the funniest character; I actually find him more complex than Harry Potter.

Concerning the movies, I have seen them all and I have liked them pretty much, not as much as the books because they are more detailed though the films were good. On the one hand, to me it was exciting to see the spells, places and characters brought to life but on the other hand, it is true that once you have seen the movies, they overshadowed for me a little the image that I had of the characters. Once I see the films based on what I have been reading I am no longer able to see the characters as I imagined them. Now I see the images of the films.

I am glad to have given a second chance to *Harry Potter*: better late than never! I am, still, not a fan even though after the second chance I like Rowling's series better than the first time around.

Teodora Toma

It was the early 2000s when I first saw *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on a classmate's desk. I had probably heard of the books and the movies as the saga was beginning to raise a stir in my country, Romania. My feelings towards my classmate biased me against the book. He was a boy and a quite cheeky one and I thought that if he enjoyed that book I was not supposed to feel the same. I was 11 years old, incidentally the same age as Harry when he first receives a letter from Hogwarts.

The years passed by and the books and films became more and more famous, which made me feel I could not trust all that hype. The fandom was starting to form as well and I was feeling quite individualistic at that time. There was also something

about them, not as *Harry Potter* fans, but as a tribe/ community: they were overtly and proudly *freaks*, which made me avoid them and the books even more.

I grew up and started to get used to the *Harry Potter* hype, even coming to terms with the idea that I would eventually have to read the series, mostly because it had become so popular. It was important to do so if I ever wanted to understand many references people made to *Harry Potter* as it had become part of my contemporary reality and generation.

I never came round to reading the series until this year, after I registered for Sara Martín's course. It was a good opportunity to try and understand the phenomenon, even if it implied having to read all the seven books, which I so dreaded. Yet I armed myself with curiosity, I tried to get rid of all my prejudices and I started to read. The beautiful edition I had bought also helped me in the little ritual which is reading: the Bloomsbury adults edition which came in a red shiny cardboard chest.

I did not know what to expect. I had seen bits of the films and numerous memes, gifs and clips on the Internet, so I was more or less familiar with the characters and the plot. I knew I was supposed to want to be in Gryffindor although Slytherin was quite tempting too, I knew Hermione was the nerdy one, that Draco Malfoy and Snape were despicable. Yet I did my best to begin reading without any prejudice, even though I was already conditioned by the aforementioned factors.

I must have read (and enjoyed!) all the seven books in about two months and a half. I could not leave the books down and I would read everywhere at any time, often sniffing the smell of the new books and attracting weird looks on the train. I have a soft spot for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as we are first introduced to Harry and it contains one of my favourite scenes, the one with the Mirror of Erised. Another volume which I really enjoyed was *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in spite of its being the longest and probably one of the saddest. Rowling conveys Harry's teenage angst and makes him seem such an authentic character, which sometimes annoyed me but also made me feel sympathetic towards him. I liked the way the narrator manages to manipulate us into liking or disliking characters (the Dursleys, Snape, Umbridge), into holding our breath in dangerous moments although we quite know nothing bad will happen. I considered myself a fairly experienced and demanding reader, but Rowling succeeded in fooling me sometimes.

I expected to read more about Sirius Black. I had heard many people before talking about him and perhaps his portrayal by Gary Oldman also contributed to the consolidation of his figure, yet I found his presence scarce in the books. I also must confess that one of my most favourite characters is Peeves, the poltergeist, and I was utterly disappointed to find out that he did not appear in the *Harry Potter* films. I think I enjoyed the moments he was being nasty to both Harry and Filch, as Peeves is the only one who does not discriminate at Hogwarts.

Harry Potter is definitely entertaining, a true page-turner. Perhaps the saga is not original in its subject, but in the way it narrates Harry's story and the twist the

author adds to previous, conventional formulas. I also think *Harry Potter* has become so popular because it found a niche and responded to a demand, a need of that particular market, which is children's literature. I also think it responds to some sort of spiritual quest, since Christian values have been made devoid of their former importance. The media and merchandise helped to spread of the phenomenon, the way they helped other books such as *A Song of Ice and Fire* or *The Hunger Games*. *Harry Potter* has changed from a series for a minority of 'freaks' to a very popular, widely consumed text.

Before *Harry Potter* I had not read fantasy fiction as it is a genre I do not find particularly appealing. I did enjoy some of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, but I find this kind of fantasy series to be a bit too long and tiresome, with many time-consuming and superfluous details. I do not particularly like the idea of the 'chosen one', which is probably the reason I do not tend to read fantasy. I have not read any of J.K. Rowling's book for adults either, but perhaps I will try to read *The Casual Vacancy*. What I will definitely read, though, is children's literature, as learning about *Harry Potter* reminded me I am in debt with authors such as Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton.

I do not think that reading *Harry Potter* as an adult (I was 21 years old when I first started to read it) is a very different experience. I was indeed a late addition to the mass of *Harry Potter* fans and I did not experience the phenomenon first hand, nor did I undergo the never-ending waiting for each sequel to be published. But the story and the characters appeal to the child we each carry within, which is why I believe it is many people's favourite. In secret we all crave to learn magic in a castle, play Quidditch, have treacle tart, pumpkin juice, Chocolate Frogs, Butterbeer and Bott's Every Flavour Beans, enjoy friends like Ron and Hermione and, none the least, fight against Evil.

Sandra Tubau Suárez

When the first book of the saga came into my hands, I was 10 or 11 years old (I am 22 now). Before that, I remember that I did not like reading at all. In school, students were given a notebook and every two weeks or every month we were supposed to pick up a book from the school library (which was actually a classroom full of bookshelves), read it (of course), and write something about the book: a summary, a description of a character, why we liked it or not, and so on. I usually went for comics or short books, but one day I came across *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

It was not particularly short, but I think the front cover caught my attention and the story seemed interesting, plus Harry had the same age as me. So I took the book home. It was wonderful, I loved it. I fell in love with the Wizarding world, with the characters and with reading, as I can say now. I even enjoyed writing in my school notebook about it! And for the next book I was supposed to read I went to the library

to look for the second *Harry Potter* book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. When I luckily found it, I devoured it.

I did not know that a *Harry Potter* movie had been made. One day, (it was autumn, almost winter) my father took me and my younger brother to the cinema, and there I saw the posters and advertising and I was incredibly surprised! I told him that I wanted to see that movie, but he insisted on watching *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* because a friend had recommended it. I did not really enjoy Jackson's movie (maybe I was too young), and spent the whole time thinking about Harry Potter. What's more, my father did not even like *The Lord of the Rings*! So when we got home, I begged my mother to take me to see the *Harry Potter* movie. We went soon after, I guess, and I loved it, and my mother and brother also loved it. My brother and I even tried to play Quidditch, which ended up with the little stuffed toy we used as a snitch flying out the window.

Since I did not find the third book in the school library and since my birthday is in December, I asked for *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* as a birthday present. I liked finding out more about the events of the past, about Harry's parents and their death, just like finding out about Voldemort's past as a Hogwarts student in the second book. That is still something that I am curious about and that I like to know, characters' pasts I mean, what they were like and what moved them to act as they did. And, then, of course, Sirius! I was terrified at first, I mean, he wanted to kill Harry (apparently). But in the end I was very happy that he had actually been faithful to the Potters, and he was Harry's godfather! I think it was in this book that I noticed that the series had turned a little darker: the Dementors, a criminal wanting to kill Harry... Then I went to see the second *Harry Potter* movie with some friends from school, and it was a little scary, scarier than reading the book: the whole 'massively huge snake on the walls, whispering creepy things' was more shocking to see on a big screen in a dark room than it was in the comfort of your nicely illuminated bedroom.

I not only enjoyed reading *Harry Potter*, I also started enjoying reading in general, even the books that are compulsory reading in school (which have the reputation of not being liked by children, at least in my school). My mother was very pleased, she used to say that reading would improve my language skills and enrich my vocabulary; until then, every time I did not know a word I would go to her (we had this little joke that she was my walking dictionary). Also, people around me noticed that I had started to read a lot, so most birthday and Christmas presents became books.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire also came as a present from one of my paternal aunts, and for the rest of the saga she was the one that would buy them for me as soon as they were published (on condition that I would let her borrow them when I had finished them!). Talking about the fourth book, I read it when I was in my first year in high school and became my favourite so far. I had become a little bookworm by then, and in a way I liked it because I felt closer to Hermione, but that is the only thing we had in common, though. By then I had this small *Harry Potter* readers group of friends, which, now that I think about it, consisted mainly of girls (was this not a book series for boys?). As soon as a book was published, we would meet in

between lessons and in the playground to talk about it (no spoilers, of course!). I was really hooked into the end of the book, Cedric was killed! How do you kill a character in a children's book!? And when Voldemort got a body I was really fearing for the characters. I mean, until then he had been this disembodied dark magical thing, but now he had a body, and he could actually harm Harry.

I do not recall noticing the change of tone as the series progressed. I think that this is because I was growing up as Harry and the others did, so in a way the book was adapting to readers as they grew up, which, I think, is one of the great things of the series. But I do recall noticing the change in the movies, especially between the third and the fourth, maybe because you could already see that the main trio of actors had started to grow up, but mainly because of the changes affecting Dumbledore. I liked Richard Harris better, I think he looked gentler and more solemn and he was the image of Dumbledore that I had as I read the first books. Michael Gambon, though, looked more mysterious and active, which I think became necessary as the story progresses.

Then, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* came and I got really into it. I loved Luna from the first scene she is in, I despised Umbridge with all my might, I wished I could be in Dumbledore's Army and the end, oh the end broke my heart. I think I finished the book on a weekend and I started crying because Bellatrix had killed Sirius. Harry, you should have listened to Hermione! Why? I think I dropped the book for some minutes, but I picked it up again and finished right away. We had very loud and emotional discussions with my friends after we all had finished the book. While I liked the book, minus the ending, I did not like the movie. I found it tedious, and today I still do not know why, but I get quite bored watching it. Then *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* became my favourite. I enjoyed much all the memories related to Voldemort and getting to know him and his whole past. When the end was coming, and Harry and Dumbledore head to the cave to destroy the horcrux, I knew it would not end well (the previous two books had activated my death-alert senses). And I was right and I got really mad because it was all a disaster, and the horcrux was fake and Dumbledore was soon killed!

It took me a while to read the last book, though I got it right after it was published, because I wanted it to last forever. When I finally read it, I loved it and I was quite satisfied with it (but that epilogue, ugh). I was also a little sad, too, because there would not be more adventures with Harry and the others. I had this emptiness inside me, asking 'what am I going to do now?' The last movies made this feeling even worse. I was crying at the end of the last one, it was literally the end of my childhood!

I am very happy to have come across *Harry Potter* in my school library and to have had him accompany me as I grew up. I think the books have taught me a lot about different values and morals, and they started my passion for reading, which actually helped me in school and high school. I like many different genres, but fantasy is one of my favourites. By the time I started enjoying reading, I also got to read C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and some of Roald Dahl's works (I specially enjoyed *The Witches* and *James and the Giant Peach*), and many other books about wizards and witches, dragons and such. When I grew older I discovered Tolkien, whom I loved,

(I could finally enjoy the movie that prevented me from watching the first *Harry Potter* movie!). Now I am currently hooked with George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which is amazing. All of this because of the *Harry Potter* series. So, thank you Harry!

Déborah Valero

Minutos robados a la suerte:

Palabras testimoniales de una venturosa niña que creció leyendo *Harry Potter*

¿Cómo usar las palabras para capturar la magia? Lo que aquí voy a contar es el testimonio de un viaje que no pretende más que ordenar y, lo que es justo poéticamente, dejar constancia de los sentimientos profundos y los recuerdos inolvidables. Un viaje que empezó cuando yo acababa de cumplir los 9 años y que se prolongará indefinidamente —until the very end.

Siempre deberíamos honrar a quienes nos regalan libros, y más si esos libros cambian para siempre nuestra vida como es mi caso con *Harry Potter*. El primer libro —y también los tres siguientes— llegó a mí de manos de mi querida tía M., que me lo compró como regalo por mi noveno cumpleaños. Los recuerdos de esa época están ya algo borrosos, pero hay sensaciones, como palpitar de sangre, que no he olvidado. La más poderosa de ellas es la que tuve al leer por primera vez el título. No recordaba haber oído 'Harry Potter' antes, y sin embargo, tenía la sensación de estar reencontrándome con un viejo conocido. Nunca le he hallado explicación a esto, aunque ahora pueda sentirlo prácticamente como una premonición: había en ello algo que, de alguna forma, anunciaba el puro amor que la sola mención de su nombre despertaría en mí años después.

En las Navidades de Diciembre del año 2000 llegaron a mí los tres siguientes tomos, y a la excitación experimentada por tener nuevo material de lectura se sumó el anuncio de que al año siguiente estrenarían la primera adaptación cinematográfica de la saga. Ese cúmulo de circunstancias hizo que *Harry Potter* se convirtiera durante ese año en uno de los ejes de mi vida.

Después el proceso se fue dilatando en el tiempo: mi adolescencia se consumió esperando a que se publicaran los tres libros que faltaban, y mi propia ansiedad me ayudó a comprender y querer a Harry hasta en sus peores arrebatos. Siempre he querido a Harry. Siempre. De igual forma ocurría con las películas, pero era algo distinto: siempre conseguí el libro el mismo día que se ponía a la venta, pero rara ha sido la película que he ido a ver en su estreno.

Sin embargo, sólo a través de la relectura —continuada, sin pararme a digerir nada porque la digestión se iba produciendo a la vez que la ingesta— me di cuenta, ya cerca de los 18 años, de que *Harry Potter* no era igual a ninguna otra cosa en la que me hubiera visto envuelta en mi vida. Gracias a internet descubrí un mundo que no había

visto hasta el momento, gente que sentía cosas parecidas a las que yo sentía cuando hablaba de la historia, y me precipité sin pensarlo hacia un pozo —por lo profundo— del que todavía ni siquiera me he molestado en intentar salir. Ha sido ahí dentro donde la saga me ha hecho vivir los momentos más memorables de mi vida. Me topé de bruces, por ejemplo, con el mundo del fan fiction, que desconocía, y lo hice gracias al epílogo del séptimo libro, pues algo en mi interior me instaba a saber qué habría sido de los hijos del Trío Dorado (Albus Severus, concretamente) si la historia hubiera continuado. Así empecé a leer fan fiction y así comencé a escribirla, aficiones ambas que, a día de hoy, todavía no me han abandonado.

Las sucesivas relecturas también me regalaron a quien es todavía —y seguirá siendo durante mucho tiempo— uno de mis personajes literarios favoritos: el villano redimido ante los ojos del espectador mediante el amor, el oscuro, amargado y triste Severus Snape. Tras el odio que sentí la primera vez que leí *Harry Potter y el misterio del Príncipe* [Mestizo], vino la vergüenza al terminar “La historia del Príncipe” y darme cuenta de que no lo había visto venir y debería haberlo hecho. A partir de entonces, siempre que releo el séptimo libro, las lágrimas empiezan a caer libremente dos capítulos antes de su muerte en la Casa de los Gritos.

Podríamos decir que estuve así, subida en la cresta de la ola, durante mucho tiempo, más si tenemos en cuenta que no hubo respiro desde que acabé el bachillerato hasta que estrenaron la última película. Normalmente me dejaba llevar, tumbada sobre mi tabla de emociones, por la fuerza del agua, pero dos situaciones me hicieron hincar la rodilla y emerger por entre la espuma. Son los dos puntos álgidos de mi experiencia del universo de *Harry Potter*, y probablemente también los dos puntos álgidos de mi vida hasta ahora. Uno de ellos es la asistencia a la premier londinense de la segunda parte de *Harry Potter y las Reliquias de la Muerte*. El desgaste físico, mental y emocional al que la experiencia nos sometió a mí y a todos los que estábamos allí —acampar en Trafalgar Square durante tres días y dos noches, con todo lo que eso conlleva— me ha hecho pensar muchas veces que se trató de un sacrificio que sólo he estado dispuesta a hacer por *Harry Potter*. Un sacrificio, no mentiré, que mereció la pena con creces: al final, conseguí tener la firma de J.K. Rowling en mi ejemplar del quinto libro. Las sesiones de firmas a las que ha asistido Rowling son muy escasas, y aquel día no todo el mundo se fue con un libro firmado a casa. Yo sí. Milagro me parece, por tanto, la denominación adecuada.

El otro momento, aquel en el que no sólo me levanté sobre la ola sino que alcé los brazos y soñé, por un instante, que acariciaba el cielo, coincide con el mejor, el más perfecto día de toda mi vida: el que pasé en el Wizarding World of Harry Potter (Orlando, Florida). Aquí es donde las palabras pierden la fuerza y la capacidad de explicar qué fue aquello para mí. Nunca los versos calderonianos de «¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí. / ¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión» han tenido tanto sentido para mí como entonces. Todo fue perfecto. Todo. Aunque se tratase de un espejismo fugaz, aunque en realidad todo aquello no fueran más que ecos en unas paredes de papel, yo estuve allí. Y todo fue real: la cerveza de mantequilla que vendía una chica llamada Autumn, las Grageas Bertie Bott de Todos los Sabores adquiridas en Honeydukes, la algarabía de Las Tres Escobas; el dragón, las arañas, los Dementores, el Dumbledore holográfico del

despacho; el coro de sapos o las exhibiciones de Beauxbatons y Durmstrang; el cartel de 'Se busca' de Sirius Black o la locomotora del Expreso de Hogwarts; la varita de Ollivanders o el sello de la Lechucería en las postales... Todas aquellas cosas... Toda la magia... Todo... Fue real. Y su valor esencial reside en su condición de vivencia única: jamás antes había experimentado esa sensación de realización personal, de felicidad plena, con tanta intensidad. La cámara trabajó prolijamente aquel día, pero la foto que nos tiró a mi amiga y a mí alguien a quien olvidé antes de poder recordar con nuestras primeras cervezas de mantequilla, serviría para resumir perfectamente mis sentimientos aquel día. He bromeado muchas veces después acerca de mi expresión de feliz arrebatamiento, pero con sinceridad creo que, si la Felicidad tuviera un rostro como el mío, sería igual que el de esa foto.

No he vuelto a vivir nada como aquello, y dudo que alguna vez lo haga. Hoy atesoro en mi memoria cada momento de ese día como minutos robados a la suerte.

No quisiera terminar sin señalar que, al redactar estas líneas, me he dado cuenta de lo difícil que resulta poner en palabras lo que *Harry Potter* significa para alguien de mi generación. ¿Cómo explicar la hondura de sentimientos como el amor o la amistad hacia personas a las que no se puede abrazar o besar? ¿Cómo justificar el dolor o el consuelo depositados en algún momento en ellas? ¿Cómo llamarlas 'amigos' o defender en combate singular la legitimidad de todo lo sentido sin que se cuestione tu buen juicio o tu madurez? Y, por otro lado, ¿cómo negar la realidad de lo que habéis vivido —pues habéis crecido juntos— y poder seguir mirándote al espejo? ¿Cómo ignorar la validez de lo que sientes una vez pasada la última página? «Que fue verdad, creo yo, / en que todo se acabó/ y esto solo no se acaba». Ruego se me perdone que recurra nuevamente a Calderón, pero es que de verdad no es fácil explicar el impacto que *Harry Potter* ha tenido en millones de vidas como la mía... No puedo transmitir con justicia la profundidad de mi afecto, pues no puedo transferir en su totalidad el cúmulo de sentimientos que las palabras tratan de asir en vano. Tú, que me lees ahora: no sabes cómo me gustaría tomar tu mano y traerte hasta mi posición, y dejarte en mi interior unos instantes para sentir conmigo. ¿Lo entenderías entonces? Quizás. Si no fuera así, trataría de ilustrarte con una última reflexión: un sabio dijo una vez que el hecho de que las cosas pasen dentro de nuestra cabeza no implica necesariamente que no sean reales... Las creencias pueden ser armas peligrosas, pero también aliadas poderosas. Un Potterhead confía ciegamente en lo que es indudablemente cierto —recojo aquí palabras de otros que he hecho mías, porque mías las siento: las historias que más amamos se quedan con nosotros para siempre. Por eso, cuando abra de nuevo esos libros, cuando pase esas páginas de nuevo, Hogwarts siempre estará ahí para darle la bienvenida a casa.

Alicia Vázquez Sánchez

It was early 2001, I was 11 years old and I had never heard about *Harry Potter*. My Catalan teacher, Griselda, who was also my school's librarian, used to warn me

when she got new books for the library, and saved them for me to read them first. One day she told me that at our local book store there was this raffle: we had to read some books, answer some questions, and we could win the whole series of *Harry Potter* books. Some students agreed to participate. So that day I left school with a book called *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. As I got home I opened it and started reading, and I just couldn't stop. My first memory of reading *Harry Potter* is being curled up in my bed, with my little Minnie Mouse lamp, terrified and amazed, just leaving Nearly-Headless Nick's Deathday party and following that mysterious, scary voice only Harry could hear.

As I finished *Chamber of Secrets* I read *Philosopher's Stone*, and since by the time I finished it *Prisoner of Azkaban* wasn't available and I couldn't wait, I read *Goblet of Fire* before reading the third book. It would seem this impatience spoiled the books for me, but not at all: from the beginning I knew Harry was a wizard, and I knew Sirius was innocent when I read *Prisoner*. And that was fine. It was not only the mystery and adventures in the books that had hooked me, it was being able to live some hours a day in such a wonderful place as Hogwarts. I've always loved castles, and Hogwarts is a castle with everything a child can dream of: ghosts, secret corridors, mysterious rooms, scary legends... All I wanted was for Hogwarts to be real.

Also the books introduced me to a wonderful fictional character: Hermione. At that time I was this little bookworm who didn't care much about boys, or being cool. I loved going to school, learning new things, and instead of going out to the playground I spent my breaks in the library. I wasn't bullied, and I had friends. But I didn't think anyone understood me at primary school, and I felt very lonely, and also thought that maybe I was weird, liking books that much, choosing to stay at home reading instead of going to the park. Meeting Hermione was a breath of fresh air. I met someone who enjoyed the same things I did, who didn't care about her looks and didn't pretend to be older than she was. I was delighted every time I read her physical description, for I was also brown-haired, brown-eyed and had big front teeth. I admired Hermione so much and could identify myself with her, which I think was a little bit arrogant.

Some years later the first *Harry Potter* movie came out. I went to the cinema five times to watch it. As it would happen with the following movies, every time I left the cinema I would criticise them mercilessly. My favourite parts of the books didn't appear, so I couldn't really like them, but I couldn't stop watching them either: they made my dear Hogwarts real. What I dislike most about the movies is that they have modified my idea of everything in the books. I don't think the image I first had has been completely erased, but it has fused with the movies. For instance, when I imagine Snape, his face is a modified version of Alan Rickman's.

I just saw in 2003 that *Order of Phoenix* was to be published. It felt like ages! I was 14 and in high school. I had met some new friends, who turned out be *Harry Potter* readers too! We couldn't wait for the book to be published in Spanish, so we found some fan translation and that's what we read. I remember it was an awful translation, and I swore to myself that I wouldn't read a fan translation ever again. The

horrible translation didn't keep me from crying desperately for Sirius's death, and being really angry with J.K. Rowling for killing one of my favourite characters.

Half-Blood Prince was published in 2005 in English. I went with my mother to the nearest shopping centre, and bought the book in English. My mother looked at me and asked 'Are you sure you will be able to read it in English?', and I nodded, reading the first page. I was 16, and all I had read in English were those really short books for English class. But I managed, and the only time I wasn't sure I had understood properly was when I read that Snape killed Dumbledore. I closed the book and went to the kitchen, where my mother was, and told her 'Mom, I think Dumbledore just died'. Then went back to my room and cried my eyes out.

The last book, *Deathly Hallows*, was published in 2007. I was 18. I bought this one in English, too. To me the last book was not as charming as the others, because most of it happens away from Hogwarts, but it was just appropriate to move the story to the 'real world'. In this book I lost so many characters I loved: Mad-Eye Moody, Hedwig, Fred, Tonks, Lupin... It was hard, I had known most of those characters for six years, and I didn't even see what happened to most of them: I just found their bodies lying there. I must admit I wanted Harry to die. I guess it was just because I knew how the book was going to end and I wanted something unexpected. What I didn't like was the epilogue, of course. I DID want to know what happened with their lives after Hogwarts, but I found the whole thing a little childish. I mean, it made me think of a story I wrote when I was 13, which ended thus, I quote: "And they got married and had three boys, named Osiris, David and Louis, and three girls, named Isis, Sara and Lara". The only good thing was knowing that Neville had become a Herbology teacher at Hogwarts itself.

When I read the last book I was devastated, because the *Harry Potter* series had come to an end. Then I told myself that I still had the movies, the last one was released some years ago. I decided that it was ok, that I still had Warner Bros. Leavesden studio to visit, and I was there two weeks ago –an amazing experience, I almost got dehydrated for the crying. Now all I have left is the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which is in Florida, a place I don't think I can visit anytime soon.

Until now I have read the first four books ten times each, and the three last about five or six. I'm 25 years old, and *Harry Potter* has been with me more than half of my life. The books have helped me in the hardest times, giving me a safe place to go when I needed to. The characters have become almost living people to me, they have been my friends and family for so long, and I'm not embarrassed of saying so. The books and the characters grew at the same time I was growing up, and I think it's a very special thing to experiment.

I haven't been a great fan of fantasy literature. Apart from *Harry Potter* I have read *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, some of Anne Rice's vampire books, and now I'm reading the series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (I've only read the first two books). Anyway, none of those books have made me feel what I felt with the *Harry Potter* series.

About Rowling's adult books, I have both *A Casual Vacancy* and *The Cuckoo's Calling*. I've started *A Casual Vacancy* twice, and I haven't managed to get further than page eighteen. I suspect that I panic every time I try, because I don't want to hate the book. I know it's stupid. I'll try again this summer.

When I read one in the blog of one of my teachers that she would like to teach a *Harry Potter* elective I couldn't believe it. Some weeks before I had been looking for universities that taught *Harry Potter* courses, and had been complaining to a friend that we had nothing like that here. I'm a shy person, and hardly ever write to teachers, or post in Facebook groups, but suddenly it happened, and somehow I got an e-mail back confirming that the *Harry Potter* elective was on (see Sara Martín's version of this here...). And so far it's been great, more than I could have hoped for.

Iris Vila García

If I ever had the chance to erase a memory from my mind in order to live it with the same intensity as I did the first time, I would choose without any doubt my reading of the *Harry Potter* series.

Before I even learned to read, I had the need for stories. My parents went nuts every day looking for new tales to read to me. I was the first one in my class to learn how to read because I couldn't wait and I died of envy every time I saw my older cousin understanding every word in a book.

At that time the frenzy started. Lots of books went from the library to my home and backwards every week. *The Five*, *Santa Clara*, *The Hollisters*, *Puck Detective* and lots of other book series passed through my hands at unthinkable speed. Every Friday my father and I went to my town's library and I stayed there for a couple of hours and got as many books as it was allowed, six books every week.

So at a point it felt as if the situation was unstoppable. My parents were always grounding me without reading for me to do the homework, to help with the housework or to practice piano, but I just needed to learn and live more and more stories. It was like an obsession, the stories seemed to end too quickly and I was running out of new books. My main worry was for my life to end without having read all the books in the world.

It might not seem likely but I actually was a very sociable little girl. I loved to laugh with my friends, to talk to them and play around, but I always had the need to share everything with a brother or a sister, with someone about my age that was there almost all the time. That never happened and I believe that is why I kept reading so compulsively: unknowingly, I was trying to find a book with characters that I could completely identify with.

At playtime, the days when I did not want to play with my friends I used to hide in the school library. There, I got special permission to take books meant for older readers because I had read almost all the ones for my age. There came a day, when I was about nine, one of those days of wandering in the library, when I discovered two new books on a shelf. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

So far, I had lived adventures of all kinds with all kind of characters but what I felt with *Harry Potter* hadn't happened to me before. With *Harry Potter*, time stopped. From the first line I read, this need to finish the book as soon as possible in order to start a new one disappeared. Suddenly I was reading quietly, enjoying every word, letting it flow through my mind slowly. I had goose bumps all over my body while I was getting more and more caught into the Wizarding world.

There was something about the characters that felt different. They all seemed more familiar than any of the other characters of the other books I had read before. I could identify myself with all of them in aspects that were essential for me. Harry was an only child, in Hermione I finally found someone who read as much or more than me. In Ron, Harry found someone that was by his side all the time and with whom he could share everything, someone like the brother he never had. Perhaps these were the books I had been looking for without knowing it.

These books made such a difference in me, they helped me realize that I would never be able to read all the books in the world, that it was not a matter of quantity but a matter of quality and that the choices I made in my reading would determine who I was and who I'd be. The *Harry Potter* series was with me while I grew up, I read it again and again and every time I discovered new things. My love for it, for its characters and its landscapes is deeply rooted in me, the books are part of my heart and my soul and everywhere I go, something reminds me of all this. It is part of who I am, part of who I want to be and this is so important for me that sometimes I find it hard to understand the people who need to shout out loud how much passion they feel for it, the people who need to show that they know everything about the actors of the movies, about the books, about everything. It's obvious that they know everything, this is the magic of *Harry Potter*. Everyone has their particular story and their particular and unique ties to the book. However, I believe, although I might not be right, that it's better to keep this passion for oneself in a certain way. It's better to travel and see in a castle or in a train, in some people or just in the minuscule things you find along the way, the resemblance to the characters, to the story or to this beloved world. And smile, knowing that deep down, there is a secret little part that knows that you are the only one that will fully understand the magnitude of what happens to you in the inside.

This is why I would like to live again the experience of reading *Harry Potter* for the first time, because it was life-changing. After all, though, I know this will never happen and even though I think of those first times with melancholy, I am also happy about it because they have been with me all along the way helping me build the person I am right now and I have the certainty that they will be with me until the end.

Clàudia Xiberta

I can't remember how old I was the first time I read *Harry Potter* (I guess this means I was little enough not to remember). I am 20 years old now.

I've always been a good reader. I used to read one *Leo-leo* book a day or every two days since I first learned to read and my mother would read me 'thicker books' every night while I fell asleep. This is how my *Harry Potter* adventure started. My cousin, four years older than me, had just finished reading the first *Harry Potter* book when I was, I think, 7 years old. He lent it to me, but I found it too slow so my mum helped me every night. I still find J.K. Rowling a little bit too descriptive and it's okay, but as I kid this made the (first) book hard/boring to read.

After the first book, the second one came. By that time, I was already 'friends' with Harry, Ron, Hermione and even Draco (I think I considered him my boyfriend or something like that). I had the first movie's poster hanging in my room –which is an important detail because it's the only poster I've ever had in my life– and I kissed him (on the cheek) every night before going to sleep.

Since I am an only child, I was used to playing alone at home, and I played a lot. I could be for four hours in my room playing with my imagination; my mum always came to my room just to ask me if I didn't feel lonely! Of course not! I was not really 'there' (in my room) but wherever I wanted and most important, with whomever I wanted. I even remember some of the things I imagined, like, for example, a time when Harry, Hermione, Ron and I were on a flying carpet (for me, a flying carpet –yes, like Aladdin's– was a 'flying car' and a flying broom, a 'flying motorbike') flying over a lava river. Draco was there, too, with his broken flying broom, so we had to rescue him but there was a landslide while we were on that rock, and we escaped thanks to a magic powder that transported us back to our rooms in Hogwarts (I know, it would have been easier to just use the magic powder from the start, but I was so adventurous...). We were all friends in my world.

I also remember the first time I saw the first movie. I went to the cinema with my mother in Platja d'Aro and some employees were disguised as characters. Quirinus Quirrell was there and he scared me a little, though I knew he was not 'the real' Quirinus Quirrell.

I had a Game Boy Advanced *Harry Potter* game, a *Harry Potter* Lego and the first movie's CD soundtrack –which my mother bought me on condition that I gave my Game Boy Colour to a poor girl whose Game Boy had been thrown away by accident. I still have all of this and I'm listening to that CD right now.

I re-read the two first books when I turned 10 or 11 and the rest of the books by myself during the next few years, always before the movies came out.

My favourite book is the last one: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. I read it during Christmas (it was my aunt's present) and I remember that because we were in Madrid and while my family got together after lunch or dinner, I was in my room reading. Finishing this last book was the strangest, most bittersweet feeling I've ever had. I enjoyed it more than the others because Harry, Ron and Hermione were travelling together (it was as if J.K. Rowling had seen my childhood fantasies and made them true!) to destroy the Horcruxes. I suppose it's normal to have become so fond of this book as I knew that was the last book (a 'goodbye'). At the same time, I was feeling like when I first got to know about Rowling's series. I was already a teenager and I lived the last books in a very different way, but I don't know how to explain this. I lived my reading in a more mature way, maybe. It's like when you get to know someone and stay friends through time. I changed with the characters, too. My vision of the world had obviously changed from the childhood innocence to the teenager's rebellion and 'anger'. I admit I still played (and play) around a lot with my imagination, and maybe that is what made it so strange, to be reading things I had imagined years before... kind of.

About the characters, I was always a big fan of Hagrid, Minerva McGonagall, Ron, Neville, Luna and Hermione. I also liked Snape, Sirius, Harry, Mad Moody Alastor, Bellatrix Lestrange (I hated her, but I liked her at the same time. She was so crazy!), and I couldn't help to still like Draco a little (I mean... I kissed him goodnight not so long ago! And deep inside, he wasn't that bad). I hated Dolores Umbridge more than anyone else; in my opinion, she was worse than Voldemort. At least he was always clear on his plans and wasn't a hypocrite.

I have all books published by Salamandra with Dolores Avendaño's illustrations (I don't like the other illustrations, they're so ugly!) and I hope my cousins will read them and enjoy them someday, but they don't like reading so much. What a pity!

I am lucky to enjoy reading so much. These books were, and I still consider them, some of my childhood friends. I'd like to re-read the *Harry Potter* series once more, but I still have a lot of other kinds of literature to read. Maybe I can re-read it all over again when I have kids of my own, and if they're lucky, they will enjoy it as much as I did.

Queralt Yuste

I do not remember at what age I started reading *Harry Potter*. I know I was an EGB student, probably in my third year, which would make me between 9 and 10. I was an avid reader, though few children's books could satisfy me. I wanted something a little more mature. Yet, when for a Sant Jordi's day I received two books of the saga, I was disappointed. I had not asked for them! Still, I gave them a try. I started with *Philosopher's Stone*. Then, surprisingly, I started *Goblet Of Fire*. See, both *Chamber of Secrets* and *Prisoner of Azkaban* were out of stock everywhere. Seeing that I

understood nothing fifty pages into *Goblet's* story, I waited until I got my hands into the other two. Still, *Chamber of Secrets* was the last one I read, which is probably why at that time was my least favourite. I waited too long for it, and it was too problematic to find.

I became hooked since page one. I wanted more and more and, what's more, I wanted to see that dragon on the cover of *Goblet of Fire*. I read them and re-read them several times and still wanted more. I then started to frequent a website on *Harry Potter* in Catalan (at a time when the internet was not so easy to access), where young people like me discussed like crazy small facts of the Wizarding world Rowling had created. It was quite an important forum, I remember that even the first Catalan translator of the books, Laura Escorihuela, contributed her point of view.

Goblet Of Fire was my favourite book. It was impressively big: besides, it presented the tournament, and more importantly, it showed the return of Voldemort. The whole background of the villain fascinated me, as did his entourage. How mad can a woman be? Ask Bellatrix. Of course, I liked many of the 'good guys'. Sirius, Lupin, Fred (yes, Fred more than George. I really don't know the reason why since they were always a tandem. I just like Fred better), Luna, McGonagall, Dumbledore, Snape. (Do we count Snape as a good guy?). For me, the trio was sometimes a bunch of inconsistent, insufferable teenagers, maybe Hermione could be saved. There were times when Harry was the perfect boy and others when I would gladly smack him with all my strength.

Order Of The Phoenix came when I was in fifth grade. It came, precisely, just a week before I was to go to summer camp with my school, four or five days in a house full of kids. I got the book a few hours before it came out. The explanation to this is that my father, who at that time was a pastry chef and had to get up earlier than anyone, went to the bookshop up the street before they opened, and bought it for me as a surprise. Since the bookseller bought croissants from him, it was a fair deal. I devoured the book within a week. I even competed with a companion to see who'd finish it first, and I beat him so hard that he would never admit it. When I reached the end, I could not believe it. She killed Sirius! Are you mad, Joanne? SIRIUS BLACK, COME ON! As cold as this may appear now, I did not cry. I became furious, but I did not cry.

Still, the story of Voldemort continued to fascinate me. The dreams, Nagini, the prophecy, the fact that he chose Potter 'just because' (why not Longbottom?). I thought, and I still think so, that Voldemort is a more interesting character than Harry. Someone else that fascinated me: Snape. That greasy, long-nosed, cold-blooded arsehole, who (oh surprise!) used to be bullied. Maybe *that* made me connect with him... (At that time, I started to have to deal with bullying myself). It is also fair to say that I prefer Severus to James. I understand why Lily decided to date and marry James (I do not think she would have been happy with Snape, honestly), but it was not a nice thing for her to do. Plus, we can all agree that James was, well, a douchebag and if we ever encountered him (or someone like him) in our lives, we would all hate him.

The years between *Order of Phoenix* and *Half-Blood Prince* seemed to pass really slowly for me. When the sixth book finally came out, I was 13. I was quite good with English and I was too anxious. I bought my copy in English, I could not wait! It was, in fact, the first time I read a whole book in English. And again, fury at the end. Now Dumbledore! I realized then (or, at least, after some consideration, trying to leave my, by then, deep hatred of her behind) what Rowling was doing. She was leaving Harry without a parental figure to relate to. It crushed me. Why do something so cruel to your own character? I remembered Arthur's attack, and asked myself how come he was saved, since he was another parental figure. And I started fearing for Hagrid. I realize now that I should have feared more for Lupin... When the Catalan version came out, I bought it and re-read it, since some parts were a little vague. Again, and this time more deeply, Voldemort's story was delved into and almost completed. But what destroyed me was Snape. Oh Severus, why?

Deathly Hallows came out when I was 15. Again, I bought it first in English, this time the same day it was released. I have a funny story to tell about that day (well, it is funny now. When it happened I was not so amused...). I bought the book. I chatted a little bit with the bookseller. Then, the second I got out of the store, I opened the book, and ran through it a little. Which page did I end up on? Fred's death. "No way, not Fred. This can't be true". I remember thinking. There you go again, Rowling. Since then, spoilers haven't bothered me, which is a good thing actually...

Honestly, *Deathly Hallows* was quite a let down. After all these years, after all the adventures gone through, the pages, the sweat, the blood... *Expelliarmus*?! It reaffirmed my initial impression that Harry was just a silly lucky boy, surrounded by very gifted people. He's trying to kill you, honey. At least *Crucio* him! (Of course, I understand that the spell is a 'very Harry thing' to do. He is not a murderer, not even of the man that killed his parents and almost all he loved. But still. Come on...). Not only the final scene let me down. The part where Ron leaves was boring. Harry and Hermione wandering from here to there, without saying much. The horcrux hunting seems to be too hurried. And Rowling kills so many good characters... Starting with Hedwig! The second death also made me grieve. 'Mad Eye' Moody. Poor Alastor. I really liked him... I shrieked when Molly kills Bellatrix. I hated and loved her. She was crazy, obsessed, cruel, fierce, independent though dependent on her master. She was a very deep character, but she needed to die. And it was Molly, the lovely mother of everyone... I have mixed feelings about that moment.

Even if it was a let down, *Hallows* was the only book of the saga with which I cried. I still cry when reading and re-reading it, and it always is in the same part. It is not Severus's death, nor Fred's, not even Lupin and Tonks (though they upset me quite a lot...). It's the sentence "You've been so brave". I started sobbing. Even now, when I go through the book to look for the exact sentence, I notice the pressure behind the eyes of a small sob trying to reach out. After all this time? Always.

The epilogue. Where to begin? I think all true Potterheads expected to find more pages hidden at the end of the book. There had to be more. She could not leave us like that, without learning more about the lives of those about whom we had read

all through our childhood. She did, indeed. We only knew that Draco was alive, that Harry had a horrible taste for names (it is a very nice thing to name your children after the people who gave their lives for you, but, to mix them up like that? Even Ron had better ideas!), and that Neville was a professor. Sheesh.

With the film adaptations I went from 'that's-nice' to 'why-are-you-inventing-so-much' to 'that's-what-I-call-a-good-adaptation' (*Deathly Hallows Part 1*) to 'here-we-go-with-the-inventions-again' (*Deathly Hallows Part 2*). I was one of those nerds that wanted every piece of detail into the film, even though I knew of the restrictions of a film adaptation.

After the books, Rowling started to release some information that was not originally included in them: the characters' future professions, Dumbledore's homosexuality, Draco's being in love with Hermione, and, recently, how she thinks now that Harry and Hermione should have ended up together. To be honest, I tend to ignore all these details. For me, since Rowling was incapable of inserting and developing all this in the books, the new information has no more validity than a fan's canon. It would have been cool to have Draco fight Ron for the girl. Or to see that blondie snob struggle with being in love with a Muggle-born. Yet, clichéd as this may sound (or be), I think she should have kept silent and refrain from revealing in interviews what should only have appeared in the books. This, along with all the gaps, the diverse *deus-ex-machina* plot turns, the misused characters... has contributed to my truly disliking Rowling. For me, she doesn't know how to write. Her world is wonderful, her success is just sheer luck.

I reached about Rowling the same conclusion I reached about Harry: nothing but a silly girl, surrounded by these very gifted people. Luckily for her. And him.

The *Harry Potter* Series by J.K. Rowling

Books

1997: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*/ US: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

1998: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

1999: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

2000: *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

2003: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

2005: *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

2007: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Other books related to the *Harry Potter* series

2001: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*

2001: *Quidditch Through the Ages*

2008: *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*

Films

2001: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

2002: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

2004: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

2005: *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

2007: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

2009: *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

2010: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1*

2011: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*

In development: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (trilogy)

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